A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature

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Contents

Introduction

The Meaning of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature

Still the Frenzied Mind and See True Nature

Seeing the Essence Through Function, Finding the Source Through the Stream

The Mind Is Originally Without; Seeing One's Nature Is Originally Having

Mind Is Nature; Nature Is Mind

Nothing Is Established; Nothing Is Attained

Verification of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature

Chan school

Pure Land School

Esoteric Buddhism

True Cultivation After Awakening

Realizing the Essence and Activating Its Function

The Question of Ultimate Destination

Conclusion

Introduction

We sentient beings, since beginningless kalpas, have lost sight of our own Original Face. Taking the false for the true and calling a servant master, we give rise to greed and anger, create karma, and undergo retribution. Like spring silkworms spinning

cocoons, we bind ourselves and fetter ourselves, with no opportunity for liberation. The foolish, being ignorant, quietly endure their hardship and do not seek liberation. Though the wise know that birth and death is a great matter and that the sea of suffering is boundless, they suffer from not knowing the gate through which liberation may be sought.

For example, the six ancient non-Buddhist teachers investigated the origin of the universe and all that exists. Some spoke of a divine self; others of primordial matter or annihilation. Modern science and philosophy, in probing the source of human life and all things, speak either of dualism or monism. Though each presents its claims with great certainty and elaborates them to the utmost subtlety, all are like blind people feeling an elephant: none is correct.

Śākyamuni Buddha, out of compassion for sentient beings who had no way out of suffering, manifested in the world to teach and transform them. For forty-nine years, adapting to the times and to beings' capacities, he taught the great and the lesser, the partial and the perfect, the sudden and the gradual. With utter sincerity, he expounded in various ways the two fundamental roots: first, the root of beginningless birth and death; second, the originally pure essence of bodhi and nirvāṇa. Thus he elucidated the mysteries of human life and the universe, revealed the causes of birth and death and rebirth, and enabled sentient beings to recognize their own original mind, see their own intrinsic nature, return to true permanence, leave birth and death behind, and bring the wheel of suffering to rest.

We sentient beings inherently possess the Tathāgata's wisdom and virtuous characteristics. Luminous in awareness, empty, and quiescent, we are no different from the Buddha. Yet because ignorance leaves us unaware, we cling to inverted delusions, remain ceaselessly agitated, create karma, and undergo retribution. Through collective karma, mountains, rivers, and the great earth appear; through individual karma, we take birth among the twelve classes of living beings. Thus the cycle begins again and again without end, and birth and death and rebirth never cease. If we now wish to return to our original nature and leave birth and death behind, we must first awaken to and break through ignorance. Unless ignorance is broken through, we remain deluded about ourselves and pursue things; on encountering circumstances, thoughts arise, and birth and death can never be transcended.

For this reason, all sūtras, treatises, and dharma gates expound and elucidate this central point—realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature—so that people may awaken from deluded feelings, eliminate ignorance, leave falsity behind and return to truth, and return home by the path before them. What distinguishes Buddhism from other religions and enables it to surpass non-Buddhist paths is precisely that it directly addresses the root of sentient beings' birth and death, and of their return to

cessation. That root lies in whether or not one realizes the mind and sees one's true nature. Thus, realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is truly the essence of Buddhism and the crucial key to transcending birth and death.

Therefore, although the sūtras and treatises are many, and their expositions and commentaries may differ, their fundamental purpose is one. Although dharma gates are extensive, and their methods and expedient means may vary, their aim is no different. As it is said, "Expedient means have many gates, but the return to the source has no second road."

Yet in these recent times of the Dharma-ending age, scholars within Buddhism have gone greatly astray. Not only do they not dare to advocate and propagate "realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature"—the profound and far-reaching intent, the very essence, of the Buddha's entire body of teachings—they blanch at it as one blanches at the mere mention of a tiger. They do not even dare to utter the phrase, set it down in writing, or promote it widely. Upon close examination, the reasons are no more than the following several points:

(I) Chan practitioners lack qualified teachers. When they apply themselves, no one guides them, gives them timely pointers, or forcefully cuts off their attachments and bonds; at critical junctures, no one opens their true eye so that they may directly see their original nature. Most cling to the same lifeless huatou—"Who is reciting the Buddha's name?"—and struggle with it for decades without any sign of awakening. They therefore regard seeing one's true nature as something exceedingly profound and difficult, beyond their reach. They exalt it as a state reserved for sages, dare not aspire to it, and still less dare to promote it.

(II) The vast majority of Pure Land practitioners say that the Pure Land school's practice is different from others: it advocates horizontal transcendence and rebirth in the Western Pure Land, without the need to realize the mind and see one's true nature. They do not realize that the Pure Land school is a great teaching that universally embraces practitioners of all three capacities. Although it does not explicitly speak of realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature for those of lesser faculties, but only emphasizes horizontal transcendence and rebirth in the Western Pure Land, in fact it has already implicitly incorporated the essential meaning of realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature within its practice.

Consider its method of practice: when reciting the Buddha's name, one must gather in the six sense faculties and sustain uninterrupted pure mindfulness.

Does gathering in the six sense faculties not mean letting go of everything? Unless one lets go of everything, can one tightly close the gates of the six sense faculties and gather seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing into a single Buddha-name? The four Chinese characters translated as "uninterrupted pure mindfulness" have

deep and broad significance, which will be explained in detail below. For now, speaking only from the surface meaning of the words, does not reciting the Buddha's name continuously with a pure mind show people how to work with their thoughts?

It teaches them to use Buddha-remembrance to steadily redirect deluded thoughts. For people cannot be without thoughts: if they are not mindful of Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, they are thinking of greed, anger, and ignorance. Thus, by skillfully using a single Buddha-name to replace deluded thoughts, people imperceptibly transform their deluded mind into Buddha-mind. As it is said, "When the Buddha-name is cast into a confused mind, that confused mind cannot but become Buddha!" What is Buddha? What else is it but realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature?

This school further says, "Entering samādhi is foremost." What is samādhi? Sanmodi ( ) and sanmei ( ) are Chinese transcriptions of the same Sanskrit term, samādhi. When Buddha-recitation reaches samādhi, the mind that recites and the Buddha who is recited both fall away at once. This is also the time when the sense faculties and their objects fall away, and subject and object both vanish. When Buddha-recitation reaches this point, it is the time when, in the Chan school, the bottom drops out of the bucket—the time of realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. At that point, what Pure Land and Chan remain? Therefore, Pure Land is Chan, Chan is Pure Land, and Chan and Pure Land are inseparable.

For those of lesser faculties, there is no need to speak much of profound Chan principles. Simply teach them to relinquish body and mind and recite straightforwardly. When emotional attachment vanishes and the mind becomes empty, realization naturally follows. Those of superior faculties awaken as soon as they hear, and need no further explanation. Thus, practitioners of lesser and superior faculties in the Pure Land school most readily attain accomplishment. Those of middling faculties seem intelligent but are not truly intelligent; they seem foolish but are not truly foolish. Because they are not truly intelligent, they cannot easily see through worldly affairs and let go of everything; because they are not truly foolish, they are unwilling to recite the Buddha's name sincerely, earnestly, and with steady dedication. Therefore, they do not easily attain accomplishment.

Furthermore, most recent Pure Land practitioners seek only to spare themselves effort, relying solely on Amitābha Buddha to guide them to rebirth in the Western Pure Land. They are unwilling to apply themselves in Buddha-recitation to sweep away their deluded minds and habitual defilements and to transform themselves, yet they call this "a dharma gate of other-power, relying on other-power for practice."

When they hear “one-pointedness of mind without distraction,” they repeatedly shake their heads and say, “No need, no need! Pure Land practice requires only faith and vows; Amitābha will naturally guide us. Whether one’s practice is effective or ineffective is unimportant.” Why would they need “realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature”? And how could they know that “one-pointedness of mind without distraction; when the lotus opens, one sees the Buddha and awakens to the unborn” is simply another expression for realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature?

(III) Esoteric Buddhist practitioners, for the most part, incline toward spiritual powers and mysterious marvels. Some even display these before the world, thereby satisfying their desire for fame and profit. They pay no attention at all to the work of realizing the essence, awakening to the Way, and transcending birth and death. They have turned this excellent Esoteric Buddhism into something thoroughly tainted with a sinister air. Its proclaimed attainment of Buddhahood in this very life or in this very body—that is, realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature—has long been cast beyond the clouds.

The three major schools now existing in our country are so dispirited and disordered; as for the other schools that have name but no substance, their condition is self-evident and readily imagined. Thus the whole splendid and radiant Buddhist tradition has been so ruined by its descendants who have failed to uphold it that it has become a state of confusion and corruption, utterly wretched. How could later learners know where the spirit of Buddhism lies? How could they cultivate themselves and nurture their nature, recover their original naturalness, and be liberated from birth and death? How can one speak of this without profound grief and indignation?

What is more, Buddhism is a great teaching that educates people to understand truth, abandon false views, turn from evil toward good, leave the deviant and return to the right, and transform humanity. It is a wholesome dharma that awakens people from deluded dreams, teaches them not to cling or be selfish, and encourages them to use all their strength to serve the public and seek the welfare of all living beings—benefiting all sentient beings universally. More than this, it is a wondrous dharma that enables sentient beings to leave delusion behind and realize truth, lay down their heavy burdens—the things to which their minds cling—and live with ease, joy, meaning, value, and genuine benefit.

Consequently, it is a great religion of immense practical and positive significance for society and the nation. For every social unrest and national upheaval is caused by the mischief of greed, anger, and ignorance, the three great evil dispositions in people. Because material desires blaze fiercely and greed rises high, people resort to every means to commit such crimes as corruption, violation of the law, profiteering, smuggling, bribery, even plotting rebellion and forming factions for

private gain. Buddhism is precisely directed against these three poisonous roots—greed, anger, and ignorance.

As for the operation of the world and the circumstances encountered by humankind, they are all karmic results summoned by people's own ignorant and deluded activity, their attachment to circumstances, and their creation of karma. In other words, people bring them upon themselves and undergo them themselves; they are not the work of ghosts or spirits. Moreover, as soon as people swiftly awaken, recognize their own original mind, and see their own intrinsic nature, everyone can become a Buddha. Buddhism is a broad and great teaching that advocates complete equality and admits no distinctions of class. For this reason, many people maintain that Buddhism is not a religion.

Furthermore, viewed from Buddhism's fundamental purpose, the perfect and sudden teaching takes its standpoint from the most ultimate level. It says that there is no birth and death to be transcended, no nirvāṇa to be realized, no Buddhas and no sentient beings, and that all dharmas are empty. To raise the mind or stir a thought is already to depart from its own tenet. As it is said, "Raise the mind and you are already wrong; stir a thought and you have already gone astray." It takes non-adherence as its tenet.

Taking non-adherence as its tenet is Buddhism's true tenet, for to adhere to some tenet is to fall into a biased view. Therefore, many people also call Buddhism nonreligious on this basis. Yet they seem to forget that although Buddhism takes non-adherence as its tenet, it is not without a guiding principle: there still remains the tenet of having no tenet. Thus it is not nonreligious either.

Buddhism teaches dialectical truth. Because it adheres to no tenet, it should not be called a religion; because it takes this non-adherence as its tenet, it should not be called nonreligious. Neither empty nor existent, neither existent nor empty: this is Buddhism's essential meaning of the Middle Way, which does not establish the two extremes. To comprehend this essential meaning, one cannot do without realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. From this it is clear that realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is a matter of utmost importance for Buddhist practitioners.

Since realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is so important for Buddhist practitioners, what exactly does it mean? How can it be realized? What state is experienced when it is realized? And what functions does it have after realization? These are all questions that Buddhist practitioners wish, and ought, to understand, and that urgently require investigation. In order to make them clear and easy to understand, and to facilitate readers' realization, they will be briefly set forth separately below.

The Meaning of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature

The term "realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature," stated concisely and comprehensively, means this: by thoroughly investigating the form and functioning of people's "mind" (the original mind), one completely sees, realizes, and directly apprehends the wondrous essence and truth of "nature" (original nature), the source of life; thus one awakens from the dream of delusion, transcends birth and death, and realizes great nirvāṇa. An analysis of its meaning in detail is exceedingly profound and vast, for it is the essence of the whole body of teachings delivered by the Buddha during his lifetime. It may be said that the Tripiṭaka and the twelve divisions of scripture are all annotations on it. For now, we can only select its essentials and speak of them briefly.

Before discussing the content of realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, and how to realize the mind and see one's true nature, let us first sketch an outline of mind and nature, so that we may more easily begin to analyze and discuss the meaning of realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature.

Then what is mind? And what is nature? What is called mind is not the fleshly organ within our chest. Rather, it is the thoughts and ideas that arise when we encounter objects. Buddhist scriptures call these the reflections of conditions constituted by the six sense objects: the lingering images left by forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tactile objects, and mental objects. In brief, this gathering and arising is called mind.

That is to say, originally we have no mind—that is, no thoughts or ideas. It is only when objects such as forms are present that we receive their images through the respective conditions of the objects, generate cognition, distinguish their sameness and difference, assign them names, give rise to attachment and aversion, acceptance and rejection, and volitional activity, and thereby produce all manner of thoughts.

This mind arises through its conjunction with the environment; it does not arise independently on one side alone. Therefore, it is called the gathering and arising that is mind. This is what modern theories describe as "thought is a reflection of the objective environment." As for a detailed account of its forms and contents, the Dharma Characteristics School's Demonstration of Consciousness Only explains them very clearly: they may be divided into eight primary consciousnesses and fifty-one mental factors. To save time and space, I shall not discuss them in detail here. Readers are invited to study the Demonstration of Consciousness Only for themselves.

If mind is thus, then what is nature? Nature is the root from which mind arises; it is the source of mind. Modern theories regard it as the energy that gives rise to mind. Without it, mind could not arise in response to objects. Our ability to give rise to mind in response to objects is entirely its functioning.

It is without form or appearance, so the eyes cannot see it. Yet it can perform all kinds of functions, and thus it truly exists. The ancients compared it to the blue coloring in dye or the flavor of salt in water: though it cannot be seen with the eyes, it is in fact functioning. In Buddhist scriptures it has many different names, such as the One True Dharma Realm, suchness, tathāgatagarbha, Buddha-nature, true mind, great perfect supreme wisdom, and so forth.

Because sentient beings are deluded and unaware, they do not recognize this wondrous essence. From beginningless time, it has mingled with arising and ceasing, becoming deluded mind. Thus mind and nature are originally one thing, like water and its waves; they are not two separate matters.

The world is now able to advance by leaps and bounds entirely through automation, and automation in turn depends on thermal energy. Without thermal energy, there is no motive power; without motive power, everything is still and lifeless. Likewise, our ability to think, work, create, and invent depends upon an inner motive power, and this power is the functioning of nature.

Therefore, although nature cannot be seen with the eyes, it truly performs every function. It is like electricity: though it cannot be seen, all illumination, operation, and so forth are its functioning. Buddhist scriptures call nature the essence and mind the function; nature is principle, and mind is phenomena. Yet within the Chan school, the two are often used interchangeably: mind is called nature, and nature is called mind. So long as we thoroughly understand their underlying meaning and clearly distinguish their boundaries, we will not be confused or perplexed by them.

Having understood the forms and definitions of mind and nature, we must further inquire: why does “nature”—the source of life—give rise to mind in dependence upon objects? And why do objects arise, so that birth and death continue in unbroken entanglement? We must also understand what the meaning of realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature includes, and how we may realize it, see it, and escape birth and death. Let us now divide the discussion into five sections and examine it in detail.

Still the Frenzied Mind and See True Nature

(I) To realize the mind and see one’s true nature is to realize that the deluded mind is unobtainable; when the frenzied mind comes to rest, one sees the true nature.

If we wish to be liberated from birth and death, we must first know their origin. If we wish to cut off a current, we must first identify its source; only then can we dam the source and cut off the current, wandering freely beyond birth and death.

Why do innumerable sentient beings endlessly cycle through the six realms, emerging and sinking again and again? Śākyamuni Buddha tells us in two succinct sentences: “The three realms are mind-only; all phenomena are consciousness-only.”

An analysis of this means that all sentient beings inherently possess the tathāgatagarbha nature. It neither arises nor ceases, is neither defiled nor pure, neither comes nor goes, and is a formless, numinously responsive, all-capable essence. It belongs neither to delusion nor awakening, and in its essence transcends both ordinary beings and sages. Yet because sentient beings are unaware and lack direct experience, they do not know that this wondrous essence is originally luminous. Thus a single thought of mistaking luminosity for an object arises, and the originally inherent wondrous light of awakened wisdom is illusorily transformed into a deluded luminosity and that which it illuminates.

The luminosity of awareness, originally one—awareness is luminosity, and luminosity is awareness; they are not two—is divided into the opposition of awareness and luminosity: outside awareness there is luminosity, and outside luminosity there is awareness; awareness is illuminated by luminosity, and luminosity is apprehended by awareness. Thus subject and object are both established. This is what the Śūraṅgama Sūtra calls: “The nature of awareness necessarily seeks luminosity, and delusion makes luminosity into awareness.”

Because of this ignorance (this luminous awareness is what we ordinarily call ignorance), one loses sight of the originally perfect luminosity and transforms the originally formless suchness into ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna)—just as a normal person becomes intoxicated after drinking strong wine.

Thus luminous true emptiness becomes inert emptiness. Then, within that inert emptiness, ignorance stirs delusively and congeals into the deluded forms of the four elements. The tathāgatagarbha nature inherently possesses the potential for the four great elements—earth, water, fire, and wind—which manifest as forms through this deluded stirring; the world itself is formed from the congealing of these four elements. This is what the Śūraṅgama Sūtra calls: “Deluded confusion gives rise to empty space; dependent on empty space, the world is established.”

Once the deluded forms of the four elements exist, the originally inherent light of wisdom turns into deluded seeing, and those deluded forms become the objects seen. Once deluded seeing has persisted for a long time, it further appropriates a small portion of the four elements as a self. Deluded seeing then relies on those

four elements as one's body—that is, ignorance encloses and fixes ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna), which enters covertly into the bodily faculties. The four elements are originally insentient, but through their appropriation by deluded seeing they become sentient. The true mind is immeasurable, but is now sealed and confined by ignorance, entering the four elements and taking them as mind. This is what is meant by "form mingled with deluded thought, with thought and form constituting the body": this is a sentient being of the five aggregates. It is also what the Śūraṅgama Sūtra describes: "Thought, clarified and settled, becomes lands; conscious awareness becomes sentient beings."

From this we can see that the deluded arising of body, mind, and world is truly the fault of a single thought that mistakes luminosity for an object—that is, ignorance. Once sentient beings have lost their original nature and mistake things for themselves, they pursue external objects, cling to them in delusion, create karma and undergo karmic retribution, and cycle endlessly through rebirth. A sutra says that when mind arises, all kinds of dharmas arise; when dharmas arise, all kinds of minds arise.

Karmic seeds give rise to manifest activity, and manifest activity in turn perfumes karmic seeds. Causes produce results, and results in turn condition causes; causes and results, results and causes, revolve again and again without cease. Thus sentient beings, though originally without birth and death, vainly undergo the suffering of cyclic birth and death without respite.

Therefore, our minds are illusory and unreal. They are merely shadows left behind by the six sense objects, while the six sense objects—the myriad things of the world—are themselves illusorily manifested through the deluded congealing of ignorance and are originally unobtainable. As the Buddhist scriptures say, they do not arise from themselves, from another, from both together, or without a cause. The deluded mind that arises from them is therefore an illusion within illusion.

Modern philosophers likewise say that the "mind" is a reflection of objective matter. Yet they say only that mind arises from matter; they do not explain how matter itself arises, and thus their account is less comprehensive than that of the Buddhist scriptures. The Buddha said: "Mind is not mind in itself; because of things, there is mind. Things are not things in themselves; because of mind, there are things." This makes perfectly clear the principle that mind and matter are mutually cause and effect and arise illusorily.

Since both mind and matter are illusory and unobtainable, when we awaken from the dream and realize that body, mind, and world are originally empty, this is realizing the mind. Yet this original emptiness is not like wood or stone, devoid of awareness and knowing; rather, it is empty and luminous, with clear knowing ever

present. Though empty and luminous with clear knowing, it remains still and unmoving, and not a single thought arises. What is this? What else could this extraordinary yet ordinary scene be but the suchness itself of our unborn and undying nature, enduring from time without beginning? When this self-nature suddenly reveals itself and one seizes it directly, this is called directly realizing the Original Face; it is also called seeing one's true nature.

What is called seeing one's true nature does not mean seeing some object with one's eyes. It is the intimate, profound realization and intuitive apprehension of the dharma eye of the mind-ground. A sutra says: "When seeing sees seeing, that seeing is not true seeing." Thus, realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature means thoroughly seeing the true nature where deluded knowledge and deluded views have been shattered, the frenzied mind has come to rest, and body and mind have dissolved.

For example, Chan Master Shenguang, the Second Patriarch, went to Bodhidharma, the First Patriarch, and said, "This student's mind is not at peace. I beg the Master to pacify it for me." The Patriarch said, "Bring me your mind, and I will pacify it for you." After a long while, Shenguang said, "I have searched for the mind, but cannot find it." The Patriarch then followed the course of events and said, "I have already pacified your mind for you!" Shenguang was greatly awakened at these words.

Here, precisely where the mind cannot be found—when the preceding thought has ceased and the following thought has not yet arisen—one thoroughly sees this nature of clear, numinous knowing, which does not fall into annihilation. Although the thought has ceased at that moment, it is not, like wood or stone, devoid of awareness. The wonder of this koan lies in the fact that mind is an accumulated delusion and has no real point of origin; once it is investigated, it immediately vanishes into nothing.

Yet although thoughts cease, the empty yet capable nature—that is, one's true nature—does not perish. Those who understand seize this very moment with full vigor, turn the light inward, and directly recognize it; this is seeing one's true nature. Modern scientists all acknowledge that energy is indestructible. But no energy is greater than the innate capacity of one's true nature.

Because this nature is formless and without characteristics, supremely vast and supremely firm—so great that nothing lies outside it, so small that nothing lies within it—it can overcome everything, while nothing can overcome it. Therefore it cannot be measured or compared. It is this that takes birth in the six realms, undergoes suffering, and enjoys blessings; it is also this that transcends birth and death and wanders freely beyond all conditioned realms. Therefore, to be liberated from birth and death, one must realize the mind and see one's true nature.

Seeing the Essence Through Function, Finding the Source Through the Stream

(II) To realize the mind and see one's true nature is to understand that the mind's wondrous functioning all arises in reliance on the essence of one's nature. From its functioning one sees its essence; from the stream one reaches its source.

An ancient worthy said: "The essence has no form or appearance; without function, it does not become manifest. Nature has no shape or features; without the mind, it cannot be made clear." Functioning arises precisely to reveal the essence; only by realizing the mind can one see one's true nature. This means that, to see one's nature, one must begin with realizing the mind; apart from the mind, there is no nature to be seen. Since the essence of one's nature is formless and cannot be seen, while the mind is its function, and function cannot manifest without appearances, it is only through the mind's functioning, which has appearances, that one can see the formless essence of one's nature.

As stated above, our thoughts, work, creations, inventions, and even the civilization of today's world are all functions of the mind. To see one's true nature, one must see it through these functions; apart from functioning, there is no nature to be seen. This is like principle and phenomena in the world: phenomena cannot come about without principle, and principle cannot be made manifest without phenomena. Principle is established precisely so that phenomena may come about, and the coming about of phenomena precisely makes principle manifest. Principle is phenomena, and phenomena are principle; principle and phenomena are inseparable. Therefore, to see principle, one must see it through phenomena; apart from phenomena, there is no principle to be seen.

Long ago, King of Divergent Views asked Venerable Bharati, "What is the Buddha?" The Venerable replied, "Seeing one's true nature is Buddha." The king asked, "Has the master seen his true nature?" The Venerable replied, "I have seen Buddha-nature." The king asked, "Where is this nature?" The Venerable replied, "Nature is in its functioning." The king asked, "What functioning is this? I do not see it now."

The Venerable replied, "Its functioning is brilliantly evident, yet Your Majesty does not see it." The king asked, "Does it exist in me?" The Venerable replied, "Whenever Your Majesty functions, there is nothing that is not it. When Your Majesty does not function, its essence is also difficult to see." The king asked, "When it is functioning, in how many places does it appear?" The Venerable replied, "When it appears, it is present in eight." The king said, "When these eight appear, please explain them to me."

The Venerable replied, “In the womb it is called the body; in the world it is called a person. In the eyes it is called seeing; in the ears, hearing; in the nose, discerning fragrances; on the tongue, speaking; in the hands, grasping and holding; in the feet, moving and running. When pervasively manifest, it encompasses the dharma realm; when gathered in, it resides within a single mote of dust. Those who recognize it know it as Buddha-nature; those who do not recognize it call it the vital spirit.” Upon hearing this, the king immediately awakened.

Consider also the Diamond Sūtra. Why, before expounding the Dharma, did the World-Honored One first include an account of donning his robe, taking up his bowl, entering the city, seeking alms, and finally arranging his seat and sitting down? It was because, in order to awaken the assembly’s capacity for formless prajñā, he had no choice but to make use of the forms of the six pāramitās. Without essence, function cannot arise. All the appearances and functions before our eyes everywhere reflect and reveal the formless essence of prajñā. Yet we do not recognize this, so the Buddha deliberately used activities possessing form to secretly indicate the wondrous, formless essence, enabling us to enter into and realize the prajñā-pāramitā.

True nature is certainly not nonexistent, yet it cannot be heard by the ears, seen by the eyes, known through conceptual knowing, or recognized through consciousness. It can, however, be illuminated by wisdom, subtly contemplated, directly understood, and intuitively apprehended. Thus it is said, “Such is awakening and understanding; awakening and understanding are such.” The hidden practice of the six pāramitās was the World-Honored One’s teaching of the Dharma without opening his mouth. When prajñā thus radiated its light, only Kongsheng (Subhūti) immediately accorded with it. In response to the conditions, he rose from his seat and asked questions, thereby bringing to completion the wondrous scripture of Diamond Prajñā.

The Mind Is Originally Without; Seeing One’s Nature Is Originally Having

(III) To realize the mind and see one’s true nature is to realize that the mind is fundamentally nonexistent and to see that intrinsic nature is inherently present.

As stated above, mind and intrinsic nature are like phenomenal function and principle-essence. Although phenomenal function has forms that can be seen with the eyes, it only seems to exist and is in fact without real existence, because dependent arising is empty of intrinsic nature. Although principle-essence has no form that can be seen, it only seems not to exist and is in fact truly present, because emptiness of intrinsic nature gives rise to dependent arising. The two support and

complete each other: apart from essence there are no forms, and apart from forms there is no essence. Hence it is said: neither empty nor existent; both empty and existent; emptiness itself is existence. Not only must we not cling to any phenomenal appearances and fall to one side; we must also see through these illusorily arisen appearances and clearly behold the true essence of intrinsic nature.

The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says: “The nature of form is true emptiness; the nature of emptiness is true form.” The essence of intrinsic nature is true emptiness, without any form; only true emptiness without form is the essence of intrinsic nature. All forms are delusive forms. Delusive forms have no substance; like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, they cannot be grasped. They are nothing but deluded thoughts.

Thus, the Heart Sūtra says that all is nonexistent: there are neither the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind, nor forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas of worldly dharmas; neither are there the Four Noble Truths and the twelve links of dependent origination of the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas; still less are there the wisdom and attainment of bodhisattvas. It is precisely where nothing whatsoever can be attained that anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi is attained. This reveals that, where the mind is clearly seen to be fundamentally nonexistent, we thoroughly behold the inherently present essence of intrinsic nature.

In the Chan school, this is called the school of extinguishing all traces and leaving nothing to rely upon. When Layman Pang asked Mazu, “Who is the person who does not keep company with the myriad things?” the Patriarch replied, “When you have swallowed all the water of the West River in one gulp, I will tell you!” When thoughts are extinguished and emptiness and existence both vanish, the wondrous essence of true emptiness naturally appears. Similarly, the modern Chan Master Chuquan went to study with Dharma Patriarch Chishan.

One day, the Patriarch asked, “The Lotus Sūtra speaks of opening, revealing, awakening to, and entering the Buddha’s knowledge and vision. The patriarchs of every generation have each given their own explanations, but those are the explanations of the individual patriarchs and have nothing to do with you. Now I want you to speak from your own realization: how would you open, reveal, awaken to, and enter the Buddha’s knowledge and vision?” The master had no reply. The Patriarch sighed, “To investigate Chan in this way is merely to waste one’s time. What benefit can there be?” He punished him by ordering him to investigate Chan while kneeling.

After investigating for three incense periods in succession, he heard the cantor strike the board marking the end of the sitting and suddenly awakened. The Patriarch examined him, asking, “How does one open the Buddha’s knowledge and

vision?" He answered: "Reveal what is inherently present—that is, the principle-essence of intrinsic nature that is inherently present."

He then asked, "How does one reveal it?" He answered: "Reveal what is fundamentally nonexistent—that is, all the phenomenal functions and appearances of mind are unobtainable; through these unobtainable functions of mind, reveal the true essence of intrinsic nature." He asked again, "How does one awaken?" He answered: "Awaken to there being neither existence nor nonexistence—thus eradicating all traces of delusion and awakening." He further asked, "How does one enter?" He answered: "Enter and emerge without obstruction—thus gaining great benefit and being free and unimpeded in speech and silence, activity and stillness."

Mind Is Nature; Nature Is Mind

(IV) Those who realize the mind and see their true nature understand that mind is precisely nature, and nature is precisely mind.

Chan Master Zhenjue said: "Although mind and intrinsic nature seem to be divided into essence and function, principle and phenomena, when examined in actuality they are neither one nor different. Speaking in terms of phenomena, wondrous functioning accords with conditions and responds by manifesting the myriad kinds of things, seeming to possess forms and appearances. Yet the wondrous essence remains unmoved, transcends all oppositions, and is free from every appearance; thus they are not one. But function arises from essence and does not depart from it; essence can give rise to function and does not depart from function."

From the standpoint that they never depart from one another, they are therefore not different. A sūtra says: "All phenomenal appearances are manifestations of nature." Although phenomenal appearances differ, being distinguished and classified in many ways, their nature is one. Thus it is said: "Nothing does not flow forth from this dharma realm, and nothing does not return to this dharma realm."

A clear mirror reflects every image, and no image exists apart from a clear mirror. All reflected images arise from the clear mirror; without a mirror, images cannot appear. Mind and intrinsic nature are likewise. Nature is the wondrous essence of true emptiness, while mind is the function of appearances. Therefore, where there is the essence of nature, there must be appearances and function; without appearances, there is no way for essence to manifest itself. Thus, appearances are nature, and nature is appearances; apart from appearances there is no nature, and apart from nature there are no appearances. This is not like inert emptiness—dull and unresponsive, lifelessly still and without awareness, falling into annihilationism.

Sentient beings, deluded by taking reflections for the mirror, cling to appearances and create karma; thus they bring about an impure land of the five turbidities. All Buddhas see nature and relinquish appearances; pure and undefiled, they thus evoke the adornments of a Pure Land. Though truth and delusion, purity and impurity, differ, the nature-essence that manifests appearances is one. We need only transform the error of recognizing reflections while rejecting the mirror into recognizing the mirror while relinquishing reflections. Then this impure land is, at this very moment, the Pure Land; there is no need to wait until after death to attain rebirth. A sūtra says: “As the mind is pure, so the Buddha-land is pure; if one wishes to purify one’s land, one must first purify one’s mind.” This is indeed well founded.

“True emptiness and wondrous presence” distinguishes this from inert emptiness: function arises from essence. Because it is true emptiness, it can accord with conditions; because it is wondrous presence, it can give rise to function. “Wondrous presence and true emptiness” distinguishes this from substantial existence: function is gathered back into essence. Because function arises in accordance with conditions, all illusory appearances manifest; thus the Amitābha Sūtra speaks of the adornments of the Buddha-land. Because its essential nature is pure and undefiled, unstained by a single dharma, the Diamond Sūtra says that not a single thing is established. Not a single thing being established is precisely the adornment of the Buddha-land, and the adornment of the Buddha-land is precisely not a single thing being established. Thus the Diamond Sūtra is the Amitābha Sūtra, and the Amitābha Sūtra is the Diamond Sūtra; they are not two different things.

The appearances and essence of mind and intrinsic nature may seem different, but in truth they are as one, like water and waves. Water has wetness as its essence, while waves have movement as their appearance. The nature of water and the appearance of waves may seem not to be one, yet waves are water and water is waves; their wet nature is not different. Therefore, for one who truly sees one’s nature, not only can the dharma eye of the mind-ground see the Way, but the physical eyes can also thoroughly see true nature. This is because nature is appearances, and appearances are nature. An ancient worthy said, “Amid the myriad forms, the one body stands revealed!” Another said, “Mountains, rivers, and the great earth all reveal the Dharma King’s body!” This means that all things in this world are manifestations of the essence of our own nature.

The Diamond Sūtra says: “If one sees all appearances as non-appearances, one sees the Tathāgata!” If we can thoroughly investigate this principle, then in daily life, seeing nature within appearances and not taking any conditioned circumstance or appearance as such, we will at once transcend all states of existence and roam freely beyond the three realms. When Master Daosheng expounded the Dharma, even stubborn stones nodded their heads; sentient and insentient alike perfect the wisdom of all seeds.

Whatever the eye sees and the ear hears, nothing is other than Buddha. In the Chan school, this is called direct pointing to mind and intrinsic nature. For example, Damei asked Mazu, “What is Buddha?” The Patriarch replied, “Mind itself is Buddha!” Damei attained great awakening upon hearing these words. Again, Lingxun asked Chan Master Guizong, “What is Buddha?” Guizong said, “If I tell you now, I fear you will not believe it.” Lingxun said, “The venerable monk speaks sincerely; how could I dare not believe?” Guizong said, “You yourself are Buddha!” Lingxun gained realization upon hearing these words. Just look—what decisiveness! What directness! What exhilaration!

Nothing Is Established; Nothing Is Attained

(V) To realize the mind and see one’s true nature is to realize that the nature of mind is non-abiding, that not a single thing is established, and that one returns to nothing whatsoever to be attained.

The nature of mind is inherently empty, numinous, and non-abiding; only thus can it function wondrously. Once it abides in anything, it becomes a fixed rut. The nature of mind has originally not a single thing: to speak of emptiness or existence, delusion or awakening, truth or falsity, is all to speak in relative oppositions and is mere idle speculation. As it is said, wherever there is verbal expression, there is no real meaning.

If one thoroughly awakens to the source of mind and clearly sees one’s true nature, then, since delusion no longer exists, on what basis can awakening be established? Even non-establishment is not established; there is utterly no dharma to be attained. Thus it is said: emptiness of the personal self is not true emptiness; one must also empty the dharma-self, and then empty even that emptiness. Only then has one truly arrived home and taken a secure seat. This is also what the ancients meant by saying that only where there is nothing accomplished, nothing attained, nothing cultivated, and nothing realized is there true accomplishment, true attainment, and true realization.

If one believes that one has a dharma to attain or a Way to accomplish, one has fallen precisely into attachment to dharmas at the level of the noble ones. At the lesser extreme, one will fail to transcend birth and death; even if one succeeds in transcending segmented birth and death, one can never transcend transformational birth and death, for attachment to dharmas is itself the obstacle to transformational birth and death. At the greater extreme, one may go mad and become a demon; the consequences are beyond imagining!

The teaching of no cultivation, no attainment, and no realization is the language of those who have thoroughly awakened and arrived at the ultimate. It is also a

teaching for those at the causal stage who are beginning to understand the Tathāgata's secret cause. Sentient beings are originally Buddhas; they do not become Buddhas through cultivation. It is only because they fail to awaken, become deluded about themselves, and chase after things and external circumstances that they sink into the condition of sentient beings. Now, if they suddenly awaken, it is like a lamp illuminating a dark room that has been dark for a thousand years.

They then recover their original nature—so what cultivation or realization can be spoken of? Hence it is said that no arduous, laborious process of cultivation and realization is required. Yet if one's habitual defilements are thick and one's deluded attachments deep, then, although one understands this principle, when encountering circumstances the mind may still stir; in that case, painstaking and continuous work of clearing them away is still needed. Further, if one merely understands the principle that sentient beings are originally Buddhas but has not personally seen one's own nature, this understanding serves only as a cause for future Buddhahood. One must then cultivate diligently in the hope of direct realization. One must certainly not boast loudly and make grand claims, deceiving oneself and others by dismissing cultivation and realization, thereby drifting blindly into calamity.

When one thoroughly awakens to the nature of mind, not a single dharma is established: there are no Buddhas and no sentient beings. All day long, one is as if foolish or dazed, functioning spontaneously in accord with conditions; all is Buddhist activity. As it is said, laughter and scolding, clearing one's throat and swinging one's arms—all are the Ocean-Seal radiating light; putting on clothes and eating, carrying water and hauling firewood—none is other than the wondrous functioning of spiritual powers. Within this there is nothing to accept or reject, nothing on which to rely; thus it is called returning to nothing whatsoever to be attained.

The moment one gives weight to anything, one obstructs one's own gate of awakening. Therefore, the great Chan masters were skilled at freeing people from attachments and bonds, causing students to lay down their heavy burdens and open the gate of awakening. Seeing that someone had become attached to his earlier answer, "Mind itself is Buddha," Mazu later replied, when a monk again asked, "What is Buddha?": "Neither mind nor Buddha!" Patriarch Linji feared that people would become attached to the phrase "the True Person of No Rank within this lump of red flesh."

Thus, when a monk again asked, "What is the True Person of No Rank within this lump of red flesh?" he pushed the monk aside and said, "What use is a True Person of No Rank—a dried shit-stick?" Again, as related in the second koan of the fourth section, when Lingxun had an awakening upon hearing these words, he asked, "How should one safeguard realization?" Guizong replied, "A single speck in the eye, and

flowers in empty space fall everywhere." These examples clearly show that true nature is non-abiding and that not a single thing is established. Therefore, we must thoroughly awaken to the true mind: we must neither seek Buddha with attachment nor become attached to spiritual powers and mysterious marvels!

Zhaozhou said, "I do not like to hear even the word 'Buddha'!" Later generations have criticized him for still retaining the position of "not liking," but Zhaozhou's intention was to end views of dharmas and show people that not a single dharma can be attained and that there is nothing on which to rely; it was not a matter of liking or disliking. As for the drawbacks of establishing words, wherever there is verbal expression, traces inevitably remain. It is like a spirit turtle swishing its tail to sweep away its tracks: although the tracks are gone, one has again left the trace of sweeping them away. Therefore, when the great Chan masters came to the final point, they could not open their mouths; they simply brushed their sleeves and returned to the abbot's quarters, thereby indicating the final point.

To summarize, realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is truly the central principle of Buddhism and the guiding standard for Buddhist practitioners. If we genuinely wish to transcend birth and death and accomplish the great Way, then, regardless of the tradition we practice, we must strive and advance toward the great goal of realizing the mind and seeing our true nature. We must never retreat out of fear of difficulty. For the institutional forms and methods of practice of every school are all means for calming the mind and stilling thoughts, and every one of these means takes realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature as its goal.

Therefore, realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is the overarching principle of all Buddhist schools. If one does not cultivate in accordance with this overarching principle, one is not a Buddhist practitioner. Furthermore, we undergo birth and death because ignorance prevents awakening. If we do not now awaken, break through ignorance, and bring forth the light of wisdom, how can we transcend birth and death? Thus, realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is the essential gateway to transcending birth and death and the pivotal hinge for realizing the great Way. Buddhist practitioners of every school must not merely refrain from neglecting, denying, or deviating from it; they must also devote all their wisdom, courage, and energy to striving for the realization of this magnificent goal.

Verification of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature

Having discussed in detail the significance of realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, we know deeply that it is of the utmost importance to Buddhism. If all

Buddhists practice, propagate, and promote it, Buddhism can flourish and prosper. Otherwise, Buddhism will be left gasping for breath, unable to recover from its collapse.

For the rise or decline, prosperity or decay, of a religion depends on the quality of its spiritual substance. If it has only an outward form and lacks essential content, that religion will inevitably decline and perish.

Realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is the overarching principle and essential core of Buddhism. Therefore, every school and every dharma gate revolves around it, skillfully adapting to sentient beings' differing dispositions and individual capacities to establish a great variety of methods of cultivation, thereby allowing it to be developed and spread. Though the methods are many, their purpose is one.

If practitioners do not follow the ritual procedures prescribed and the dharma gates established by their respective schools, diligently and sincerely applying themselves to cultivation, but merely burn incense, make prostrations, and seek a little blessing, they cannot attain the essential purport of those schools—realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. Without realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, they naturally cannot attain the true purpose of studying Buddhism.

If Buddhism's spiritual goal cannot be made manifest, how could it fail to languish and decline day by day? Therefore, if we are to revitalize Buddhism, we must promote realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. What method, then, can enable us to attain this goal? And what method is the quickest, simplest, and most practicable? In order to accommodate practitioners of the highest, middling, and lowest capacities,

and to enable people of differing habitual tendencies to enter the path swiftly, we shall now select from the three traditions of Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism the simplest, quickest, and most convenient methods of cultivation, and introduce them in detail below. As for the other schools, as stated above, they retain only their names and lack their actual substance; there are no people who genuinely practice them.

For example, although the Tiantai school has the dharma gate of calming and contemplation, its practitioners today all cultivate the Pure Land path. Although the Huayan school has the three Huayan contemplations, its practitioners either enter Chan or Pure Land practice and no longer cultivate contemplation. The Dharma Characteristics School also has Consciousness-Only contemplation, but its practitioners now discuss doctrine, analyze technical terms and characteristics, and engage in Buddhist studies rather than contemplation; they have even divided from the Nature School into separate camps, with disputes arising in profusion. The remaining schools, such as the Three Treatises school, have gradually become so

forgotten that even their names and teachings are fading from memory; therefore, we shall set them aside for the present and not discuss them.

Chan school

When it comes to realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, no method is simpler or swifter than the Chan school. For Chan is a special transmission outside the teachings: it does not rely on written words, but points directly to the human mind, so that one sees one's nature and becomes a Buddha. Other schools, by contrast, establish many rituals and rules by roundabout means, requiring practitioners to cultivate step by step and gradually attain realization. To enter a treasure store, for example, Chan has only one door: once it is opened, one may enter. Other schools have at least two doors, and some have more than three or four.

Thus Chan is the orthodox tradition of Buddhism. Its style is lofty and formidable, its momentum vast and majestic; it has produced generation after generation of outstanding people and displayed innumerable aspects, and alone is called the school of the patriarchs. The flourishing and prosperity of Chinese Buddhism depended chiefly on this school as its central pillar, bearing the main burden alone. Yet regrettably, by modern times, this sole gateless gate seems already to have been blocked.

Not only does this school now have few capable people; it entirely lacks the vigorous bearing of the great masters of old, their methods of freely restraining and liberating people, and their marvelous skill in giving timely hints and guiding beings according to circumstances.

The so-called Chan school of recent times, from south to north and east to west, wherever one travels in the country, merely teaches people to investigate the rigid, lifeless huatou: "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" If you ask them to indicate another expedient method besides "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?"

Unable to evade the question, they merely say that Chan must be investigated for oneself and that there is no need to ask others. They cannot reveal some other skillful means to enable students to awaken on the spot. As a result, Chan practitioners investigate painfully for decades without any sign of awakening; realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is treated as a relic of history and set aside.

Master Taixu said with boundless sorrow: "The descendants of the Chan school today transmit the Dharma merely among Dharma relatives; they do not transmit it after realizing the mind and seeing their true nature. Those called several

generations of descendants of the Linji school are all but blank sheets of paper—when have they ever awakened to the mind!" How can these words fail to cause pain?

The most important thing in the Chan school is qualified teachers.

The reason students can awaken quickly is entirely that clear-eyed teachers guide and rigorously train them, offering timely hints and breaking through their delusions. Otherwise, for sentient beings burdened by karmic obstacles, with the mysterious gate tightly closed and the lock of consciousness difficult to open, how easy is it to investigate and attain realization through one's own power? Yet qualified teachers are now so scarce—where can one find great masters of such stature, sincerely and skillfully working for others? Therefore, certain wild-fox spirits use the stereotyped huatou repeated by everyone else—"Who is reciting the Buddha's name?"—as a hiding place.

If you ask them, "What is Buddha?" they tell you to investigate "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" If you ask, "What is neither mind, nor thing, nor Buddha?" they again tell you to investigate "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" In short, apart from "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" they have no instruction to offer. In this way, those below imitate those above, until the Chan school is reduced to an empty name and a complete mess. Is this not lamentable?

If, whenever this is asked, one is told to investigate for oneself, and whenever that is asked, one is likewise told to investigate for oneself, what use is there for a Chan master? Frankly speaking, it is not worth a laugh.

The truth is that such so-called masters have not themselves opened the true eye; they are blind people with their eyes open. To ask them to use expedient and skillful means for others—is that not like asking a blind person to make coquettish eyes? If one or two clear-eyed people say that there is no need to investigate in this manner, but that one may instead use direct pointing—directly pointing out what the Original Face is, so that one sees one's nature on the spot—they slander you as practicing wild-fox Chan.

Because they themselves have practiced for decades without any sign of awakening, they doubt that others can likewise see their true nature. They may even say, "The ancestral halls have transmitted that Chan investigation requires investigating 'Who is reciting the Buddha's name?' How could there be any direct pointing?" This is being unable to do it oneself and doubting others as well. How could the Chan school fail to decline and languish?

In fact, from ancient times the Chan school did not originally require investigation of any huatou, but gave direct instruction. As Layman Fu said: "Night after night, I sleep

holding the Buddha; morning after morning, I rise together with him. Rising and sitting, we are always together; in speech and silence, we dwell together. We are not separated by even a hair's breadth, like body and shadow. If you wish to know where the Buddha is, it is precisely this voice that speaks."

Master Baozhi's Praise of the Mahāyāna and Hymns for the Twelve Hours are both direct pointing. The final two lines of his Hymns for the Twelve Hours say: "Those who have not understood, listen to one word: who is it, right now, that moves the mouth?" This is even more direct, swift, and lucid.

Master Huisi of Nanyue wrote: "Heaven cannot cover it; earth cannot support it. It neither goes nor comes and has no obstruction. It has neither length nor shortness, neither blue nor yellow; it is not in the middle, nor within or without. Transcending the multitude while together with the multitude, it is as mysterious as vast empty space; it points to things and transmits mind, yet people do not understand." The verse of Monk Budai says: "This very mind—mind, mind—is Buddha, the most numinous thing in the worlds of the ten directions. Its wondrous functions, extending in every direction, are wondrous indeed; nothing is as true as mind."

He also said: "I have a Buddha in this one body, yet people of the world do not recognize it. It is neither molded nor adorned, neither carved nor engraved. It has not a drop of clay nor a trace of color. A painter cannot paint it, and a thief cannot steal it. Its substance and marks are naturally so; its purity requires no wiping." There are too many such sayings to enumerate.

Even patriarchal Chan merely responds to the question brought by the person who comes, removes that person's attachments, and, where the deluded mind cannot function, presses the person to turn the light inward and thoroughly see what is original. For Chan is the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa; it is a perfectly sudden dharma gate, belonging to awakening rather than cultivation.

The great worthies of old all attained the essential meaning upon hearing a word, recognized the opportunity before a phrase was spoken, and saw their true nature and realized the Way. Not one attained awakening by investigating a huatou for a long time. When the Sixth Patriarch heard someone reciting the Diamond Sūtra, he immediately awakened. After receiving the Fifth Patriarch's instruction and confirmation, he spoke to Huiming only thus: "Do not think of good; do not think of evil. At just such a moment, what is the Original Face of Venerable Ming?" Huiming greatly awakened upon hearing these words. There is no account of his being taught to investigate any huatou.

This Huiming koan once gave rise to a dispute. Some said: "This is the Sixth Patriarch's direct pointing. When one neither thinks good nor thinks evil, that which

is clear and distinctly aware, without falling into annihilation, is the Original Face. Nage (　) should be understood as 'that'."

Others said: "No. Nage (　) should be understood as 'what': he was told to investigate it himself, not directly informed." Both sides clung to their own position and fought many battles of ink, yet still reached no conclusion. In my humble view, however, whether it is understood as that or what depends entirely on the person concerned.

If one can immediately grasp the Sixth Patriarch's hint, "what" is "that"; if one is muddled and confused, not knowing why, "that" is "what." Why insist on distinguishing "that" from "what"? Chan sayings are originally double-edged blades: one edge kills, the other brings to life; they cannot be fixed upon and viewed from only one side. Moreover, the great worthies of old often used direct pointing.

For example, Chan Master Linji instructed the assembly: "Within this lump of red flesh is the True Person of No Rank. Do you wish to recognize this True Person of No Rank? It is the one who, at this very moment, speaks the Dharma and hears the Dharma."

Again, when a monk asked Huihai, "What is Buddha?" Hai said, "We are clearly conversing face to face—if this is not Buddha, what is?" Or, as in the earlier example, when a monk asked Guizong, "What is Buddha?" Zong said, "You yourself are it!" Such examples are too numerous to list.

How direct and exhilarating such instructions are! If we too used direct pointing to instruct students, rather than teaching them to investigate some huatou, could we not also produce capable people? Unfortunately, many criticize direct pointing, saying that Chan Master Yaoshan, a disciple of Shitou, had already denied the validity of this method.

For example, when Official Yu Xiu asked Chan Master Ziyu, "What is Buddha?" Yu called out, "Official!" Xiu answered. Yu said, "This itself is it; there is nothing else." The official gained realization. Is this not direct pointing? Yet when Yaoshan heard of it, he said, "Official Yu Xiu has been buried in Purple Jade Mountain."

Does this not show that he did not approve of direct pointing? Later, when Official Yu Xiu heard Yaoshan's words, he was greatly perplexed and again went to consult Yaoshan. Yaoshan said, "If you have doubts, simply ask." The official asked, "What is Buddha?" Yaoshan too called out, "Official!" The official answered. Seizing the moment, Yaoshan pressed him: "What is it?!" The official greatly awakened. See how powerful this question was! How could the effect of such great awakening be achieved by direct pointing?

When I heard this, I could not help laughing: you gentlemen know only one side and not the other. The method of direct pointing takes many changing forms; it is not uniform. Yaoshan's reason for not approving of Ziyu was to test whether Official Yu Xiu's heels were truly planted on the ground. If he had truly awakened, then even if a Buddha appeared in the world, it would be as though he neither heard nor saw. If he had not truly awakened, he could not avoid following at another person's heels.

After Mazu had instructed Damei that mind itself is Buddha, he also once sent an attendant to test Damei by saying, "Neither mind nor Buddha." Thus Yaoshan deliberately offered a remark to fish for the official, to see whether he would take the bait. Unexpectedly, Yu Xiu's heels had never touched the ground: as soon as he heard it, doubt arose. He was unlike Damei, who had awakened thoroughly and was without doubt. When the attendant came to test him, Damei instead rebuked Mazu: "That old fellow confuses people's minds!" He was wholly unmoved.

Once Yu Xiu had arrived at Yaoshan's, he again asked as before. Not wishing to disappoint his question, Yaoshan changed the manner of direct pointing and hinted that this response was Buddha, enabling him to comprehend. Since Yu Xiu had asked, "What is Buddha?" the answer should not depart from the question; it should answer what Buddha is, and not answer with some other matter. Otherwise, it would not answer the question asked.

Therefore, after the official answered, Yaoshan pressed him, "What is it?" Is this not equivalent to clearly telling him that this very response is Buddha? Thus, this question-shaped response is another suggestive method of direct pointing. It appears to be a question, but when read in continuity with what precedes and follows, it is equivalent to an affirmative statement.

Though the phrasing of Ziyu and Yaoshan differs, their method is the same. If Ziyu's affirmative statement had not come first, someone unclear about the matter, on hearing only Yaoshan's question-shaped response, "What is it?", might again take it as a question to be investigated. Why, in later generations, were these methods no longer used, and investigation of huatou adopted instead? Because people's minds became increasingly dangerous and frivolous, while their capacities gradually grew weaker and shallower.

With direct pointing, those who are clever and quick may indeed comprehend. Yet because it comes without much effort and is so easy and convenient, they do not value it. It is like the spoiled sons of wealthy families who inherit the property of their fathers and grandfathers: having never labored and sweated themselves, they do not know how difficult it was to acquire. They squander it recklessly, and in the end become impoverished and destitute, dying as strangers in another land.

Therefore, such people cannot appreciate the patriarchs' heartfelt compassion for others. Instead, they take it lightly and casually, cannot follow the teachings, safeguard their realization continuously and closely, uphold the Way and nurture their intrinsic nature, and realize the true fruition. Though the ignorant may receive every kind of instruction and exposition, because they see no extraordinary spiritual powers or mysterious marvels, they assume it is not the true teaching. They refuse to take it up themselves and always seek the Dharma outside the mind, hoping for miraculous effects.

Although the Dharma teacher feels profound and urgent compassion and wishes everyone could immediately see their nature, attain Buddhahood, and realize fruition, he cannot force an ox to eat grass or undertake realization on another's behalf. Thus, Master Dahui Zonggao of the Song dynasty was compelled to change the method to investigating huatou (although huatou had previously been investigated, the practice had not yet become widespread). A huatou without rational meaning was placed in the student's mind to give rise to a great sense of doubt.

It is like swallowing a thorny chestnut burr: one cannot swallow it, yet cannot spit it out. The entire body and mind are pressed into the mass of doubt; walking, one does not know one is walking, and sitting, one does not know one is sitting. All deluded thoughts and emotional imaginings imperceptibly dissolve completely into the sense of doubt.

When the right time and conditions arrive—that is, when one's practice matures—the bottom of the bucket drops out. It is like meeting one's own father at a crossroads: only then does one realize that all one formerly did was like dreaming in broad daylight. How muddled and foolish it was to struggle for fame and profit—what shame! After awakening to the mind, one realizes that painstaking investigation, too, was superfluous, for Buddha-nature is naturally genuine and does not belong to cultivation or realization.

Yet without taking this seemingly wasted detour, how could one unlock the tightly sealed mysterious gateway of consciousness and see one's Original Face? Though the road may be longer and appear pointless, one has nevertheless developed strength along the way. This differs from those who merely read Buddhist scriptures and recorded sayings and engage in empty theoretical discussion. Although they may seem similarly awakened and understand Buddhist principles, when circumstances arise they are ineffective and are constantly turned by circumstances. Dahui rebuked them as "medicinal mercury: when it meets fire, it immediately flies away." This was the patriarch's painful concern for others: adapting expedient means to the time and circumstances, out of unavoidable necessity.

Although the patriarchs established the school of investigating huatou, they certainly did not teach everyone to investigate the same rigid huatou. Rather, they taught according to the individual, assigning different huatou in response to different capacities. The effectiveness of a huatou lies in arousing a sense of doubt; if no doubt arises, it is utterly useless. Thus there is a saying in the school: “Great doubt brings great awakening; small doubt brings small awakening; no doubt brings no awakening.”

Moreover, some huatou can only break through the first barrier or the second barrier; they cannot carry one all the way through to break the final barrier. Therefore, one huatou certainly cannot teach everyone. To investigate huatou, one requires a teacher’s discerning eye to recognize the student’s capacity and provide an appropriate huatou, so that upon investigating it the student can give rise to doubt and thereby benefit.

Otherwise, one merely wastes time, and it has no effect. Furthermore, during the investigation the teacher must constantly pay attention, carefully observe the student’s progress, and press the student forward from the side. Above all, the teacher must seize the timely conditions connected with the huatou the student is investigating, pressing and prompting the student so that they may awaken immediately, recognize their own original mind, and see their own intrinsic nature.

For example, when Huang Shangu was studying with Huitang, Huitang instructed him to investigate Confucius’s saying to his disciples: “Do I have anything hidden from you, my disciples? I have nothing hidden from you.” Shangu investigated it for a long time without awakening. One day, while Shangu and Huitang were walking in the mountains, a gust of wind brought the fragrance of osmanthus blossoms. Shangu blurted out, “What a wonderful fragrance of osmanthus!” Huitang immediately responded in accordance with the occasion, saying, “I have nothing hidden from you.” Shangu attained great awakening at those words. From this we can see how important the teacher-student relationship is in the Chan school. But where now can one find such a great master with clear vision?

Since the Chan school has become lifeless through rigid adherence to old rules and is steadily declining, perhaps the present course must again be changed and another shortcut taken, in order to break the impasse and revive Chan. Judging from the capacities and conditions for Chan at the present stage, I believe that one should instead directly point out the Original Face, rather than continue to adhere to a single rigid and lifeless huatou, so that students may awaken swiftly.

A teacher need only take up the point at which a visitor asks a question and press that person until discursive consciousness can no longer function and they turn the light inward to see for themselves. The teacher should then instruct them to

safeguard this realization continuously and closely, eliminate deluded habits, and perfect the fruition of the Way. There have been many excellent examples of such direct pointing throughout history. For instance, someone asks, “What is Buddha?” The answer is, “Who is asking?” “I am.”

The teacher challenges, “What do you call ‘I’?” The person replies, “Seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing are I; this body is I.” The teacher asks, “The body is you; then who is it that knows the body is you?” “That too is I.”

The teacher asks, “If both the body and that which knows are you, does this not make two yous?” The person replies, “If both the body and knowing are not I, would that not fall into annihilationist emptiness?” The teacher then calls, “So-and-so!” The person answers, “Yes!” The teacher points directly and asks, “What is this? Is it annihilationist emptiness?” (This clear, numinous knowing—which has neither body nor ordinary cognition, yet does not fall into annihilationist emptiness—what is it if not Buddha?) Thereupon the person suddenly attains great awakening.

Again, someone asks, “Can the Original Face be seen?” The answer is, “It cannot be seen.” The questioner asks, “Why can it not be seen?” The answer is, “The Original Face is you yourself. If you yourself were to see the Original Face again, would that not make two Original Faces? How could an eye see itself?” The questioner asks, “Then is the Original Face nonexistent?” The answer is, “Although the eye cannot see itself, the eye is not nonexistent.”

“When you are not thinking good and not thinking evil, are there still deluded thoughts?” The answer is, “Not a single thought arises.” The teacher asks, “When not a single thought arises, are you like wood or stone, without knowing?” The answer is, “There is clear, ever-present knowing.” The teacher points directly: “What is this clear, ever-present knowing, which is neither existent nor nonexistent? Is it not your Original Face?” Again, someone asks, “What is my own self?” The answer is, “Is not the one now asking you yourself?” The questioner then asks:

“May I take this questioner as my own self?” The answer is, “No.” The questioner asks, “Why not?” The answer is, “Although the questioner is you yourself, if you recognize yourself as an object, you make two selves. You say that the questioner is you yourself, and yet recognize the questioner as yourself; does that not make two selves?” Thereupon the person is released and attains great awakening.

If one points directly according to the occasion in this way and enables someone to awaken immediately, is that not swift and convenient? Compared with those who laboriously investigate for decades without any sign of awakening, the difference is as vast as that between heaven and earth. Someone may say, “Those awakened through such direct pointing may be ineffective when circumstances arise.”

The reply is: “If they truly accept it for themselves, then even if their habitual defilements are deep and they may at first still go astray, if they can safeguard their realization continuously and closely—like the ancients herding an ox after awakening, holding tightly to the rope and whip throughout the twenty-four hours and not allowing it to stray—then after two or three years, there need be no fear that their practice will fail to become continuous and undivided or to reach complete maturity.”

What must be most avoided are superficial Chan practitioners who are specious and shallow, merely skimming the surface. Though their speech may sound smooth and comprehensive, they have not truly awakened to mind and intrinsic nature.

They are also unwilling to practice with both feet on the ground, tempering the mind through circumstances and safeguarding realization continuously and closely. If they allow themselves to wander and stray, they will ultimately be ruined. Yet if, amid the vast sea of people, one can bring even one or two persons to open the true eye and become guides for humans and devas, this is far better than having people laboriously investigate for decades without result, leaving no one to inherit the Dharma lineage, so that one is forced to transmit the Dharma merely by means of lineage documents.

Furthermore, the intention of the ancient worthies in having people investigate huatou was simply to make them turn the light inward and see for themselves where mental activity could no longer proceed. But people today have inferior capacities: struck by this muffled blow, they die beneath the staff and cannot come alive again. How much better to point directly, enabling them to accept it for themselves and then safeguard and perfect their realization.

Furthermore, Chan is the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa: it clings to nothing, and there is nowhere to apply the mind. Yet investigating huatou is precisely a place where the mind is applied. Wherever the mind is applied, there is attachment to appearances; where there is nowhere to apply the mind, that is the proper application of mind.

For example, a monastic asked an ancient worthy, “How should one apply the mind to investigate the Original Face?” The answer was, “There is nowhere in the Original Face for you to apply the mind. ‘Investigating’ is precisely a place where the mind is applied.” The monastic asked, “If there is nowhere to apply the mind, how should one apply it?” The answer was, “Where there is nowhere to apply the mind is the proper application of mind; wherever the mind is applied, there is attachment to appearances.” The monastic asked, “If there is nowhere to apply the mind, does that not fall into emptiness?” The answer was, “Who is it that knows it falls into emptiness?” “It is I.”

The teacher said, “Since this is you, how could it fall into emptiness?” The monastic asked, “May I take this one who knows it falls into emptiness as I?” The answer was, “No.” The monastic asked, “Why not?” The answer was, “Though gold dust is precious, if it falls into the eye, it becomes an obstruction.” The institutions and methods of the Chan school were established appropriately by great patriarchs in response to beings’ capacities, sensitivities, and timely conditions; there is no fixed model.

Since the past could change from direct pointing to investigating huatou, why can the present not change from investigating huatou to seeing one’s nature through pressing questions and answers? For prolonged investigation of huatou now breeds abuses: it has become a single rigid and lifeless huatou that cannot arouse doubt in anyone, with the result that people investigate painfully for decades without any sign of awakening. Moreover, circumstances are now different. Everyone is busy, and no one can devote decades exclusively to Chan investigation as people once did. Even those who possess such single-minded resolve and are willing to spend a long time in arduous investigation are not permitted to do so by the age in which we live.

Moreover, Chan belongs to awakening through wisdom: it uses extremely powerful wisdom to open the mysterious gateway of consciousness. Awakening does not arise from the accumulation of meditative concentration. If direct pointing is now adopted to show students their nature immediately, followed by the ox-herding method of safeguarding realization and removing habitual tendencies to support perfect realization, this better accords with the times and does not violate the principle of the Chan school.

For Chan is precisely realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature, and throughout history there have been many methods of direct pointing for realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature. They are not inventions of today, so what objection can there be? To strengthen readers’ confidence, I will cite below another convenient and swift method of direct-pointing Chan, demonstrating that my words are not mistaken.

Chan Master Zhenjue was reading the Śūraṅgama Sūtra together with his attendant. When they reached the passage, “When I press my finger, the ocean-seal emits light,” the attendant asked, “What does this mean?” The master said, “That old Śākyamuni deserves thirty blows with a stick!” The attendant said, “What fault has he committed that he deserves thirty blows?” The master said, “Why press the finger at all?!” The attendant said, “But whenever the mind is momentarily stirred, the dusts and toils of affliction arise first.” The master gave a great shout: “That too is the ocean-seal emitting light!” The attendant attained great awakening and said, “Ah! For many years, I thought that whenever the mind arose, it was an afflictive, deluded thought. I did not know that it was originally the ocean-seal emitting light!”

Everyone, please consider how forthright, clear, and swift such direct instruction is. Those who hear it awaken at the words themselves; how could they not rejoice throughout their lives, with boundless joy? As for the distinction between deluded thoughts and the emission of light—that is, wondrous functioning—it lies in whether one clings or does not cling in everyday activity, in responding to conditions, and in engaging with things.

If one clings to it, the Ocean-Seal's radiance becomes the deluded thoughts of worldly toil; if one does not cling to it, the deluded thoughts of worldly toil are themselves the Ocean-Seal's radiance. The Sixth Patriarch said: "If, amid transformation, one leaves no emotional attachment, then amid manifold arising one ever abides in Nāga samādhi." Master Hanshan explained: "To transform consciousness into wisdom requires no other wondrous technique.

In the ongoing flow of each thought in daily life, if emotional thoughts remain attached and entangled, wisdom becomes consciousness. But if, in the transformation of each thought, the mind has no attachment and forms no root of emotional clinging, consciousness becomes wisdom. Then, at all times, one constantly abides in the great Nāga samādhi!" Master Hanshan also dreamed that he ascended to Tuṣita, where Maitreya explained Consciousness-Only to him: "Discrimination is consciousness; non-discrimination is wisdom. Relying on consciousness brings defilement; relying on wisdom brings purity.

Defilement entails birth and death; purity has no Buddhas." How concise and lucid these words are, like pouring sweet dew into a parched throat. How fortunate we are to hear them! If we do not now dispel the mists of delusion, clearly see the Buddha-nature, and safeguard realization in daily life until it is complete, what is there still to doubt?

Perhaps someone may say: "To practice Chan, one must undergo arduous investigation and attain awakening before great function can manifest. Chan that directly points to sudden awakening and seeing one's nature is merely verbal Chan or literary Chan, even wild-fox Chan, and is of no use." Others may further believe that, even when practitioners of other schools cultivate to the point of seeing their nature, this is not Chan; only investigating a huatou is the authentic Chan of the special transmission outside the teachings.

They seem to have forgotten that when Mahākāśyapa, the First Patriarch of the Chan school, received the Buddha's Mind-Seal, he did not attain awakening and receive the Dharma through arduous investigation of a huatou. Rather, when Śākyamuni Buddha held up a flower before the assembly, he smiled and received the Mind-Seal. One should know that Chan is precisely the wondrous mind of

nirvāṇa and the Buddha-nature of suchness. So long as one realizes it clearly and without doubt, that is enough; it does not depend on any particular method.

All methods are merely means for clearly seeing it; the method used does not determine whether the Chan is genuine or false. Such means must be adapted to differing times and to the superior or inferior capacities of practitioners. They should be adjusted as circumstances require; one must not stubbornly cling to fixed views or rigidly adhere to old rules.

Otherwise, it is very difficult to train capable people and perpetuate the Buddha's lineage. Conversely, many people say that, because the twenty-eight patriarchs of India and the six patriarchs of China did not awaken through investigating huatou, but through directly pointing to the mind and seeing their nature to attain Buddhahood, Chan ended with the Sixth Patriarch, and everything afterward is merely teaching rather than Chan. Therefore, what makes Chan Chan most certainly does not lie in any particular traditional method.

As for the claim that great function must manifest, what exactly does that mean? If it means that spiritual powers must appear before great function can be said to manifest, that is far too attached to appearances and much too narrow-minded.

What the Chan school calls great capacity and great function refers to a manner of conducting oneself in the world that is open-hearted, high-spirited, impassioned, magnanimous, and outstanding; to a style of being unaffected by anything one encounters, not clinging when events arise, and clearly discerning the critical moment in advance. As the saying goes, "Though Mount Tai collapses before one, one's expression does not change; though deer suddenly spring up on one's left, one's eyes do not blink." It does not refer to whether spiritual powers manifest.

If we speak of spiritual powers, are dressing, eating, invention, and creation not spiritual powers? If you say they are not, why did Layman Pang say, "Spiritual powers and wondrous functioning: carrying water and hauling firewood"? Clearly, your contempt for everyday activity as not being spiritual power is caused by your inferior disposition of clinging to appearances, seeking marvels, and delighting in the mysterious. In other words, your mind has fundamentally never become empty and has never seen its nature; you are still seeking through attachment to appearances.

If one continues in this way, then even if spiritual powers manifest, one will enter a demonic path, because clinging has not been severed. Many people hold such views. Let us give another example to show that ordinary daily activity is itself spiritual power and wondrous functioning, and that one must not seek extraordinary marvels elsewhere, lest one trouble one's spirit and enter a demonic path. After Magu and four other great adepts realized the Way, they traveled about visiting teachers in order to deepen their understanding.

At that time, the weather was hot and they were thirsty. Seeing an old woman selling tea by the roadside, they called to her, “Please bring us five cups of tea.” Seeing that five monks had come, the old woman asked, “Where are you, venerable ones, going?” They replied, “To visit a spiritual friend.”

After serving the tea, the old woman said, “To drink tea here, one must have spiritual powers; without spiritual powers, one may not drink it!” Although the five masters had already awakened, their spiritual powers had not yet manifested. They looked at one another and did not dare lift their cups to drink. Seeing this, the old woman burst into laughter and said, “Five foolish birds, watching this old woman display spiritual powers as she drinks tea!” She raised the cups and drank them one by one.

When the five saw this, they suddenly awakened. In unison they said, “Today is the time when we have truly realized the Way! We are always amid spiritual powers, yet do not know they are spiritual powers and still race outward in search of them. Had we not encountered this old woman today, we might again have missed them for an entire lifetime!” Although this was an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva giving them guidance, was it not also showing us the way out of our confusion?

Bodhidharma said: “When deluded, form encompasses consciousness; when awakened, consciousness encompasses form. Once the root is attained, there is no need to worry about the branches.” With direct pointing and seeing one’s nature, if one truly accepts it without doubt, one will naturally let go completely, embody samādhi within wisdom, and remain in daily life utterly free of attachment.

Even if one’s habitual defilements are deep and cannot be wholly purified at once, so that particular circumstances still give rise to thoughts and feelings, as soon as a preceding thought arises, the following thought immediately recognizes it. One does not linger there or become reluctant to leave. With further continuous and meticulous polishing and unceasing tempering, one will surely reach the point where “the skin has entirely fallen away, leaving only the one reality exposed,” and there will be no need to worry that great spiritual powers will not manifest. Those who are half-believing and half-doubting, still hesitant and indecisive, are another matter.

If one says that practitioners of other schools who cultivate to the point of seeing their nature are still not practicing Chan, why do the scriptures clearly state: “If a person merely keeps Amitābha Buddha in mind, this is called unsurpassed profound and wondrous Chan”? When practitioners of the Pure Land school recite the Buddha’s name until they attain one-pointedness of mind without distraction and, when the lotus opens, see the Buddha and awaken to the unborn, do they not then

converge with the Chan school? Thus the ancient worthies said: Chan is the Chan of Pure Land, and Pure Land is the Pure Land of Chan.

Chan is Pure Land, Pure Land is Chan; Chan and Pure Land are inseparable.

Since the relationship between Chan and Pure Land is thus, how could it be otherwise for other schools? For they are all spoken by the Buddha, all clarify the mind and see one's nature, and all transcend birth and death. Why insist on dividing into schools and factions, denouncing one another and quarreling like brothers within the same household? As stated above, some say: "Chan belongs to awakening, not cultivation; Chan is sudden, not gradual.

Chan as Chan ended with the Sixth Patriarch; everything afterward is merely teaching, not Chan." This is because teaching expounds gradual cultivation: one step at a time, ascending level by level, with cultivation, attainment, and realization. Chan, on the other hand, is complete as soon as one awakens; at all times and in all places, one simply follows conditions freely and acts with spontaneous ease, with no cultivation, attainment, or realization. After the Sixth Patriarch, Chan masters everywhere taught gradual cultivation and investigated realization; therefore, they were merely teaching and not Chan.

These statements sound lofty and subtle, but upon examination, they may have no sound basis. The Chan school and doctrinal teaching do indeed differ as to suddenness and gradualness, awakening and cultivation, but the difference lies in their distinct points of entry, not in the speed or slowness of realization. Those who attain a broad and complete understanding through studying doctrinal principles and directly realize their inherent nature are called followers of the teachings; those who directly point to the mind and see their nature to attain Buddhahood are called followers of the Chan school.

Once they reach the destination, however, there is no difference between them; they are the same. Therefore, the ancients said: teaching is Chan with sound, and Chan is teaching without sound. We cannot say that contemporary Chan practitioners, whose capacities are gradually inferior and whose habitual defilements remain unpurified after awakening, must rely on gradual cultivation to eliminate residual habits, and are therefore practicing teaching rather than Chan. If one insists that only immediate and complete awakening, without the need for safeguarding realization, herding the ox, or clearing away residual habits, followed by simply returning home to sit securely with nothing further to do, is Chan, then the more than ten years that the Sixth Patriarch spent concealing his light and cultivating himself among hunters after his awakening could not count as Chan either.

Therefore, one cannot so arbitrarily declare that only immediate completion upon awakening is Chan, while gradual cultivation after awakening is teaching. Through countless kalpas and lives, we have acted in inverted and deluded ways and become accustomed to attachment. These tendencies have accumulated into habitual patterns deeply embedded in the field of ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna). Though we may now awaken, our deeply rooted habitual defilements still exert an influence that is difficult to dispel.

It is like a foul bucket that has held excrement for many years. Once it is emptied, the stench has nonetheless penetrated the wood and cannot possibly be removed all at once; it must be soaked, washed, scrubbed, and scoured for a long time before the remaining odor can gradually disappear. Therefore, genuine practitioners who keep their feet firmly on the ground know well the sweetness and bitterness involved. They do not dare speak wildly and, upon gaining the slightest entry into awakening, falsely praise themselves as having no cultivation, attainment, or realization.

Of course, one cannot say that there are absolutely no people who, upon a single awakening, arrive at no cultivation, attainment, or realization. Yet they are ultimately few, not something everyone can hope for. Moreover, the sudden awakening and sudden realization of such people of the very highest capacities today are not unrelated to their gradual cultivation and gradual realization in the past. An ancient worthy said: today's suddenness is precisely yesterday's gradualness.

Therefore, one cannot dismiss with a single stroke those who cultivate, awaken, and realize gradually, claiming that they are not practicing Chan. Moreover, from the perspective of the Chan school throughout its history, those who cultivate gradually after awakening have constituted the great majority. Even the immensely renowned Chan master Zhaozhou was said to have continued traveling on pilgrimage at the age of eighty, much less anyone else.

Long ago, a scholar who had read several recorded sayings of Chan patriarchs claimed that he had attained great and thorough awakening. He went to visit Chan Master Guizong and said that he had arrived at no cultivation, attainment, or realization. Guizong merely smiled and assented.

When the scholar took his leave and Guizong saw him to the gate, he said, "How did that large hole come to be in the back of your brocade robe?" The scholar anxiously asked, "Where? Where?" Guizong shouted, "So much for no cultivation, attainment, or realization!" The scholar's face flushed with embarrassment, and he departed. Is this not a revealing portrait of those who boast of having no cultivation, attainment, or realization, only to expose their own folly?

To sum up: when we neither think good nor think evil—when the preceding thought has ceased and the following thought has not yet arisen—there is empty quiescence without thought, yet we are not like wood or stone. Suddenly turn the light back and directly recognize this clear, numinous knowing as the Original Face. With neither confusion nor meditative fixation, responding to conditions without the slightest attachment, this is realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature.

Furthermore, intrinsic nature is true emptiness and wondrous presence, not inert emptiness. Because it is true emptiness, it necessarily has characteristics and function; because it has characteristics and function, it is true emptiness. Therefore, nature is characteristics, and characteristics are nature.

When, in daily life, we can see intrinsic nature through appearances and are not turned by appearances; when we recognize that all things, and every appearance and function, are manifestations of intrinsic nature and the mind's wondrous functioning; when we avail ourselves of what things can do without being controlled by them—this is realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. An ancient worthy said, "Pick up a blade of grass, and it is a sixteen-foot golden body." This is an illustration of the state after awakening; one must not imagine it to be something extraordinary or mysterious.

For extraordinary and mysterious things are themselves deluded thoughts. Not only do they obstruct one's own gateway to awakening, preventing one from realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature; they also carry the danger of falling into demonic states. One must know that all spiritual powers and mysteries are founded on realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. So long as, after awakening, one diligently removes the five hindrances—wealth, sex, fame, food, and sleep—and is not affected by any sensations, the result will come naturally: the six supernormal powers will all manifest. It is like the great roc, which flies tens of thousands of miles with one flap of its wings: it relies entirely on a small thrust from its feet below. If its feet did not push off from the ground, it could not take flight.

If this is not so—if, after this explanation, one still does not dare to affirm it with certainty or accept responsibility for it, yet wishes to realize the mind and see one's true nature—then there is nothing better than practicing Esoteric Buddhism and proceeding from it to Chan; this is comparatively easier and more reliable. Relying on the empowering blessings of the Buddhas in Esoteric Buddhism seems much faster and more convenient than the Chan school's self-reliant investigation.

Moreover, Esoteric Buddhism has exceptionally effective skillful means, drawing upon various powers to guide practitioners. Unlike Chan meditation, which has no other method apart from a teacher's pressing guidance and instruction, it therefore brings accomplishment more swiftly and effectively than the Chan school. It is like

traveling by car or airplane, which is naturally less arduous and faster than walking. Yet the dharma gates of Esoteric Buddhism are profound and vast, and its ritual procedures are numerous; students cannot easily grasp its full scope all at once.

Among its practices, the simplest, quickest, and easiest to undertake, and the one closest to Chan, is the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. This practice is formless esoteric practice: it has no complex ritual procedures, requires no establishment of a maṇḍala, and may be practiced by anyone at any time and in any place. Nor does it require detours, preliminary practices, or a progression from form-based to formless practice; one can directly realize the essence and bring forth its function. Thus people often praise it as Chan-Esoteric Buddhism. Though the expression is not quite appropriate, there is much to commend in its meaning. Its method of practice will be discussed later under “Esoteric Buddhism.”

Pure Land School

The Pure Land school has a dharma gate profound and vast, universally embracing practitioners of all three capacities and comprehensively encompassing the eight teachings. For mind itself is the land, and the land itself is mind; apart from mind there is no land, and apart from the land there is no mind. Hence the sūtra says: “If you wish to purify your land, first purify your mind; as your mind is purified, so is the Buddha-land purified.” The land is mind, and mind is the greatest energy in the universe: vast, with nothing beyond it; minute, with nothing within it. Nothing whatsoever lies beyond the capacity of mind; therefore, no school can transcend the Pure Land. Thus, the Pure Land can be lofty or humble, profound or elementary.

According to the fundamental meaning of the Pure Land, when a practitioner's mind is pure, every land and every place is pure and free; the worlds of the ten directions are all simultaneously transformed into Pure Lands. If the mind is impure, then even in an adorned Buddha-land one remains inverted and afflicted. The ancient worthies said: “When the mind is pure, Avīci itself is a Pure Land; when the mind is defiled, a Pure Land itself is Avīci.” As for the West, it signifies that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west—the completion and fulfillment of the result. Therefore, the great being Samantabhadra sought rebirth in the Western Pure Land through the Ten Great Vows, in order to perfect Buddhahood.

Those who truly cultivate the Pure Land constantly contemplate their thoughts: they may practice contemplation through Buddha-remembrance, contemplate the adornments of the Pure Land and the sacred image of Amitābha Buddha, or contemplate that they themselves are Amitābha. They do not allow the mind to pursue conditions or abide in attachments. As soon as a thought arises, they keenly recognize it and turn it to emptiness, or raise up the thought of the Buddha to dissolve the deluded thought, preventing it from continuing.

After long, single-minded concentration and diligent practice, when the proper time and conditions arrive, the one who contemplates and what is contemplated, the one who recollects and what is recollected, suddenly fall away. Amitābha's true nature then clearly appears before one; one directly sees the dharmakāya and is, at that very moment, reborn in the Pure Land in this present life. In the Chan school, this is called realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature; in the Pure Land school, it is called "When the lotus opens, one sees the Buddha and awakens to the unborn." Though the expressions differ, their meaning is one. Thus Chan and Pure Land are inseparable.

To be truly reborn in the Pure Land does not mean waiting for rebirth after death. One must strive diligently in this present life and be able to be reborn at this very moment; only then can one be certain. The phrase "at the time of death" in the Amitābha Sūtra is generally interpreted as "when the breath ceases and one dies," but this is merely an interpretation based on the literal wording.

According to the sūtra's essential meaning, "at the time of death" does not mean when one physically dies; it means "when the root of birth and death is finally severed." What is this root of birth and death? It is our inverted deluded thoughts. Thus, immediately after speaking of the time of death, the Amitābha Sūtra says: "the mind is not inverted, and that Buddha appears before them."

When we exert ourselves in contemplation or Buddha-recitation, we may reach the point where, walking, we do not know that we are walking, and sitting, we do not know that we are sitting. We apply ourselves with unremitting diligence; apart from the thought of the Buddha, there are no other thoughts. Then this root of birth and death—deluded thought—is about to be severed. Finally, the sense faculties and their objects fall away, and one-pointedness of mind without distraction is attained. At that very moment, one directly sees the true Buddha and is reborn in the Pure Land.

Only then does one know that Sahā is precisely Ultimate Bliss, and Ultimate Bliss precisely Sahā. The ordinary distinctions between east and west, and talk of purity and defilement, are all like dreaming in broad daylight. Hence, those truly reborn in the Pure Land are reborn without birth; they go without going. If one still distinguishes Sahā from Ultimate Bliss, or Pure Land from defiled land, this is precisely because the mind has not yet been purified and deluded thoughts have not yet been exhausted.

Regrettably, most present-day Pure Land practitioners direct their vision toward the lowest level and begin practice from the most elementary point. They all say that they practice the Pure Land school with rebirth in the West as their aim, and that rebirth in the West depends on the Buddha's compassionate power to receive and

guide them; it is practice based on other-power, not self-power like Chan practice, so there is no need to realize the mind and see one's true nature.

But if they are asked, "What is one-pointedness of mind without distraction? Why does the Amitābha Sūtra say, 'hold fast to the name for one day, or for as long as seven days, with one-pointedness of mind without distraction'?" they repeatedly say that it is unnecessary. Master Ouyi of Lingfeng said: "Whether one attains rebirth depends entirely on whether one has faith and vows." So long as we possess true faith and earnest vows, Amitābha Buddha will naturally receive and guide us to rebirth in the West at the end of life.

So long as one can be reborn in the West, even rebirth in the lowest grade of the lowest rank, or even in the borderland or city of doubt, is sufficient for one's vows. For once one has reached the West, becoming a Buddha is only a matter of sooner or later; one will ultimately be assured of Buddhahood in one more lifetime. How many thousands of times better this is than sinking in the six realms in Sahā!

Because this calculation seems so advantageous, some faithful men and women often shift responsibility for rebirth in the West onto Amitābha Buddha, while they themselves are unwilling to cultivate diligently and advance with courageous vigor.

Apart from performing the morning and evening services, they do not at all follow the methods of cultivation taught by the ancients: continuously sustaining the Buddha's name to sweep away deluded thoughts and transform habitual tendencies, purify the mind-ground, and accumulate provisions for rebirth. How could they know that Master Ouyi's words form two corresponding clauses and absolutely must not be severed and interpreted out of context?

For faith, vows, and practice are the three essential principles of Pure Land cultivation; not one of them may be lacking. Pure Land masters have explained this very clearly: without faith and vows, one cannot connect with the Buddha's compassionate power of vows and be reborn in the West; without practice, not only can one not demonstrate that one's faith is genuine and one's vows earnest, one cannot even fulfill one's faith and vows.

Therefore, after speaking above of faith and vows, the master goes on to say: "The rank of rebirth depends entirely on the depth of holding the name." This means that rebirth in the highest grade of the highest rank certainly requires very deep cultivation and practice; even rebirth in the lowest grade of the lowest rank requires a corresponding degree of practice before rebirth can be attained. For lack of strength in practice is precisely evidence that one's faith is not genuine and one's vows are not earnest. It is not the case that every person whose mouth recites the Buddha's name while their mind remains impure can attain rebirth. Moreover, the master's preceding statement was directed at those of his time who sought

meditative stability through Buddha-recitation but gave no thought to rebirth in the West.

Master Yongming Shou said: “When a practitioner's pure karma has matured, the mind-ground is purified and accords with the Buddha; only then does one see the Buddha appear before one and guide one to rebirth in the West.” Although the Buddha appears before one, there is in fact no coming or going. It is like the moon in the sky, reflected at once in a thousand rivers and myriad waters, though the moon itself is not divided. Mind is like water: if the mind is impure, it is like turbid water. Though the moon is in the sky, its reflection does not appear. Thus, for those whose minds are inverted and confused, even if the Buddha emits light to receive and guide them, they are like those born blind, unable to see the sun.

According to Esoteric Buddhist teaching, Amitābha Buddha arouses unconditioned great compassion: there is no one whom he does not receive and no being whom he does not save. Regardless of what kind of sentient being it is, at the time of death he treats all equally, emitting light everywhere and receiving them for rebirth in the West. It is only because sentient beings' obstacles are heavy that they cannot connect with him. Some, moreover, fear the blazing brilliance of the Buddha's light, flee from it, and rush into the evil realms. Is this not tragic and lamentable?

Therefore, if we truly wish to be reborn in the West, we must practice diligently, earnestly, and steadily. We must never seek an easy way and fear hardship, shifting sole responsibility for rebirth in the West onto Amitābha Buddha. Otherwise, why does the Contemplation Sūtra of Amitāyus Buddha teach us various methods of contemplation, and why does the Amitābha Sūtra teach us to hold fast to the name until one-pointedness of mind without distraction is attained?

Visualization and contemplation of forms require a subtler mind, and the practice is more difficult than Buddha-recitation by holding the name. Therefore, in recent times Pure Land practitioners have generally cultivated only the practice of holding the name. We shall now discuss the method and subtleties of this dharma gate of Buddha-recitation by holding the name.

Śākyamuni Buddha silently observed that sentient beings in the Dharma-ending age are deeply stained by defilement and find it difficult to open the mysterious gate and unlock the consciousness, to be free from suffering and attain happiness. From compassion, he employed vast wisdom and skillfully established the dharma gate of Buddha-recitation, placing a pure Buddha-pearl—the great name containing myriad virtues—within sentient beings' deluded and defiled minds. In secret, it redirects their inverted deluded thoughts and severs the root of birth and death at its nearest point, so that the flower of mind opens, Amitābha's Buddha-nature is seen, and rebirth in the Pure Land is attained.

Everything is created by mind alone, yet people cannot be without thoughts. If they do not recollect the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, they will surely think of greed, anger, and ignorance. When they think of greed, anger, and ignorance, the evil karma of killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct arises; once evil karma arises, the cycle of birth and death does not cease.

The Buddha therefore adapts his guidance to circumstances. Seizing upon sentient beings' habitual inability to remain without thoughts, he skillfully and expediently uses a single thought of the Buddha to replace deluded thoughts, enabling people, without realizing it, to transform deluded thoughts into thoughts of the Buddha and exchange a defiled mind for a pure mind. Thus they may easily attain rebirth in the Pure Land and leave birth and death behind.

The ancient worthies said: “When a clear pearl is placed in muddy water, the muddy water cannot but become clear; when the Buddha's name is cast into a disordered mind, the disordered mind cannot but become Buddha.” Master Lianchi said that Buddha-recitation is the most intimate and simplest transformation made at the point most closely connected with sentient beings' birth and death—the deluded mind.

If we do not understand the deep intention and great teaching of the Buddhas and patriarchs, and do not earnestly transform ourselves through the practice of Buddha-recitation, how can we attain our aim merely by relying on Amitābha's power of vows to receive us for rebirth? The ancient worthies said: “With single cultivation—relying only on Amitābha's power of vows—rebirth in the West is difficult; with dual cultivation—one's own effort in accord with the Buddha's power—rebirth in the West is easy.” Truly, these are immortal words.

Having understood the function of Buddha-recitation and the principle of rebirth in the West, we know that Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva's instruction on Buddha-recitation—“gather in the six sense faculties, and sustain uninterrupted pure mindfulness”—is an unerring and immutable maxim of supreme truth.

Practitioners of all three capacities, whatever kind of person they may be, must follow this precise instruction. Inwardly, let go of body and mind; outwardly, let go of the world. Gather the six faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind entirely into a single Buddha-name, sustaining it continuously and without interruption. Naturally, without realizing it, one transforms the deluded mind into the Buddha-mind, enters into responsive communion with Amitābha in the West, and becomes continuous and undivided. Thus the ancients said: “Of ten thousand who practice, ten thousand attain rebirth.”

When reciting the Buddha's name, one must neither be too hasty and pursue a numerical count, lest this injure one's vital energy and deplete the blood, nor be lax

and slow, allowing deluded thoughts an opening to enter. One must neither seek one-pointedness of mind without distraction, lest delusion be added to delusion, nor regard continuous Buddha-recitation as difficult and shrink back in fear.

If we truly see through the red dust of the world, know that everything is illusory, and have no lingering attachments, we will certainly be able to grasp firmly a single Buddha-name and sustain it with effort, without merely reciting with the mouth while the mind is confused and deluded thoughts surge without rest.

If, in Buddha-recitation, one can exert oneself as though pushing a heavily laden cart up a mountain, each phrase following the next and every syllable clear, then even those of the very lowest capacity need not fear that Buddha-recitation will fail to become continuous and that the mind will fail to awaken. The efficacy of Buddha-recitation does not lie in understanding profound and abstruse principles, but in single-mindedness. When the mind does not run outward, one can let go of everything and recite the Buddha's name single-mindedly with wholehearted resolve. After a long time, when the practice becomes pure, why fear that the deluded mind will not dissolve or that Buddha-nature will not be seen? Hence it is said: “Those of the very lowest capacity possess the highest wisdom.” To see through the red dust of the world, let go of everything, and recite the Buddha's name with focused mind—this is the highest wisdom.

Pure Land masters advise people not to concern themselves with whether they have attained one-pointedness of mind without distraction, nor to ask whether they have realized the mind and seen their true nature. Simply recite straightforwardly, calmly, steadily, and at an even pace; the result will naturally follow as practice matures.

First, the masters fear that by demanding one-pointedness of mind without distraction or realization of the mind and seeing one’s true nature, we may add delusion upon delusion and thereby hinder ourselves instead. Second, they fear that setting the bar too high may intimidate sentient beings, causing them to recoil from the difficulty and not dare to undertake cultivation. This does not mean that the dharma gate of Buddha-recitation does not require one-pointedness of mind without distraction, or that it is unrelated to realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature.

The Pure Land school embodies profound principles within practices that are simple and accessible, and through genuine practice secretly accords with the subtlety of the Way. Therefore, people of superior, middling, and lesser capacities who follow its teachings and recite the Buddha’s name straightforwardly may all see their true nature. It is unlike the Chan school, which receives only those of superior capacity and sharp intelligence, while those of middling and lesser capacities have no way to enter. Thus, this dharma gate is profound and vast.

Some may say that this is Chan teaching and does not accord with the principles of the Pure Land school. In order to strengthen the reader's confidence, I excerpt below a passage from Master Yinguang's Buddha-Recitation Samādhi to demonstrate that my words are not mistaken:

"As for the method of realizing samādhi, when reciting the Buddha's name, one must turn awareness back upon the recitation itself, concentrating exclusively on a single object and not allowing the mind to race outward. With every thought, attend to the source of mind; with every moment of mind, accord with the Buddha's essence. Recite while turning the recitation back; contemplate while turning contemplation back. In reciting, contemplate; in contemplating, recite. One must make the whole of recitation contemplation, and the whole of contemplation recitation; apart from contemplation there is no recitation, and apart from recitation there is no contemplation.

Although contemplation and recitation may be as inseparable as water and milk, one has still not probed to their source. One must repeatedly investigate and vigilantly sustain the thought of 'Namo Amitābha Buddha.' The more one investigates, the more incisive it becomes; the more one sustains it, the more intimate it becomes. When one's strength reaches its limit and one's practice becomes pure, recitation suddenly falls away together with all thought, and one realizes the state of no deliberate recitation, yet nothing apart from recitation. As it is said: 'The numinous light shines alone, far transcending faculties and objects.

The essence reveals true constancy, unconstrained by words and letters. The nature of mind is unstained and inherently complete; merely depart from deluded thoughts, and you are the Buddha of suchness.' This is what it means. When practice reaches this point, one has attained the method of Buddha-recitation; there is communion of response between oneself and the Buddha, and this is precisely the time to exert oneself. Its signs are like clouds dispersing from the vast sky, revealing the clear blue heavens completely. One personally sees the original nature, yet originally there is nothing to see; seeing without seeing is called true seeing.

At this point, the sound of streams and the colors of mountains are all the ultimate truth; the cawing of crows and chattering of magpies are nothing other than the supreme true vehicle. One responds freely to the appearances of all dharmas without abiding in a single dharma; one shines brightly upon all objects, yet there is not a single thing at all. Speaking of its function, it is like the rising sun, perfectly bright and radiant; speaking of its essence, it is like the setting moon, pure and still.

In illumination there is stillness, and in stillness there is illumination; both are retained and both fall away, beyond all relativity and perfectly interpenetrating. It is like snow covering a thousand mountains or the ocean containing the myriad forms:

there is only one color, with no differing flavor at all. Speaking of its benefits, though one has not yet left the Sahā world, one constantly participates in the ocean-wide assembly; at death, one immediately ascends to the highest grade and suddenly realizes the Buddha vehicle. Only those within the household know its affairs; if one speaks of them to outsiders, slander is certain!"

Everyone, look at this passage. Does it not follow exactly the same course as the Chan school? When reciting the Buddha's name, one must not only unify contemplation and recitation, but also repeatedly investigate and vigilantly sustain the thought of Amitābha Buddha. Is this not precisely the Chan practice of investigating a huatou? As one's investigation becomes ever more incisive and one's sustaining ever more intimate, until one's strength reaches its limit and one's practice becomes pure, all suddenly falls away and one realizes the state of no deliberate recitation, yet nothing apart from recitation.

Is this state, together with the extensive passage below depicting the state after awakening, not precisely the state in which Chan investigation suddenly opens one's Original Face and one realizes the mind and sees one's true nature? At present, we do not speak to ordinary people of investigation and vigilant sustaining. We speak only of the mind reciting and the ears hearing, of unifying contemplation and recitation, and of investigating with utmost effort. When practice becomes mature, one will naturally have a sudden release and realize samādhi, which is entirely no different from the Chan school's realization of the mind and seeing of one's true nature. But one cannot be like most people today, who regard merely performing the morning and evening services as sufficient.

Having said this, it is truly difficult to speak! Even the highly virtuous and greatly revered Master Yinguang, at the end, had to sigh, "If one speaks of them to outsiders, slander is certain!" How much more so for others! When the Buddha taught at the assembly of the Lotus Sūtra, five thousand people still left their seats; how much less can one expect, in this Dharma-ending age, that everyone will accept it in faith and give rise to neither doubt nor slander? How could that possibly be achieved?

Esoteric Buddhism

Esoteric Buddhism is the most expedient, most complete, and most appropriate dharma gate through which all Buddhas liberate sentient beings in the Dharma-ending age; it is also a dharma gate from which no school can depart. From essence to function, from small to great, from shallow to profound, and from the branches to the root, it lacks nothing and is complete in every respect.

Regrettably, modern Buddhist practitioners do not attend to proper cultivation and realization of the essence in attaining the Way. They merely learn superficial methods for manifesting function, indulge in mystification and displays of spiritual powers, and become thoroughly tainted with bizarre airs—something that upright persons of attainment disdain. Even Master Hongyi, not understanding the true nature of Esoteric Buddhism and being misled by its outward forms, once slandered it.

Later, after deeply studying the teachings and contemplative methods of Esoteric Buddhism, he came to know its inconceivable depth and breadth and the completeness of its dharma gates. He deeply repented and warned later students not to doubt or slander the Vajrayāna because they misunderstood its rituals. They should first thoroughly study the scriptures of Esoteric Buddhism and master its teachings before investigating the cultivation of its rituals.

Precisely because students of Esoteric Buddhism do not attend to proper cultivation, those who practice Chan or Pure Land keep far away from Esoteric Buddhism, fearing that they may be tainted with bizarre airs. In fact, this is superfluous and unnecessary.

For the Vajrayāna is the mind-seal of all Buddhas. Even the Buddhas of the three times cannot attain Buddhahood apart from it, much less later students of such schools as Chan and Pure Land. To try to leave it or evade it is like fleeing one's shadow in the sunlight: one only increases one's own toil. Take the Pure Land school, for example. Although it does not advocate realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, in order to eliminate karmic obstacles and ensure rebirth in the Western Pure Land, it is necessary to uphold the Śūraṅgama Mantra, the Great Compassion Mantra,

the Rebirth Mantra, and the Ten Minor Mantras. Are not these many mantras Esoteric Dharma? When Chan practitioners investigate until their karmic seeds churn and they can neither advance nor retreat, becoming so distressed that they feel they cannot bear it, they cannot pass this difficult barrier, break through the sense of doubt, and directly realize their original nature without relying on the empowering strength of the mantras and of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Master Hanshan said: "The great Chan masters of every generation all secretly upheld sacred mantras and covertly relied on the Buddha's power, but kept this unspoken. I now openly point this out to you all: when, in investigating Chan, the seeds of beginningless ignorance churn and you are so vexed that you feel unable to bear it, you must promptly invoke the Śūraṅgama Mantra Heart. Only by relying on the Buddha's compassionate power can you cross this difficult barrier." Even Chan, which prides itself on realization through one's own power, proclaims the loftiness

of its lineage style, and is a special transmission outside the teachings that directly points to seeing one's true nature, does not depart from the Vajrayāna—how much less can other dharma gates do so!

According to the Japanese Outline of Esoteric Buddhism, an emperor once summoned the great masters of the various schools to the imperial palace to hold a Dharma assembly and discuss which school was best and enabled the swiftest realization of the Way, so that he might choose one to practice.

After the patriarchs of the various schools had each presented the strengths of their own tradition and proclaimed it the best, swiftest, and most complete, the Esoteric master Kūkai addressed the emperor: "All the schools are good, and each has its strengths, but none can be separated from Esoteric Buddhism. Apart from Esoteric Buddhism, there are no schools. Since Esoteric Buddhism is the mind-seal of all Buddhas, how could there be any schools apart from the Buddha-mind? Thus Esoteric Buddhism truly gathers the strengths of all schools. It is the most complete, most expedient, and swiftest dharma gate, and the necessary path by which the Buddhas of the three times attain the Way." The emperor deeply approved, and thus Esoteric Buddhism alone flourished in Japan.

Esoteric Buddhism relies upon the Mahāvairocana Sūtra and the Vajraśekhara Sūtra. It establishes ten kinds of mind, encompasses all teachings, and sets forth maṇḍalas; when the three mysteries of body, speech, and mind correspond, ordinary beings become sages. Only Buddhas can know its inconceivable powers and functions; bodhisattvas at the causal stages cannot fathom them. Its profound esoteric mysteries are also teachings not permitted to be shown to those who have not received empowerment; hence it is called Esoteric Buddhism. Its schools and dharma gates are numerous and lie beyond the scope of the present discussion, so they will not be detailed here. I shall only briefly discuss the important points related to realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature.

When Esoteric Buddhism is mentioned, people seem to think only of miraculous manifestations. Thus Emperor Wuzong of the Tang deeply feared that Esoteric practitioners would employ spiritual powers to overthrow his realm and topple his throne, and he ordered Esoteric Buddhism suppressed. Later, Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang of the Ming was even more wary of Esoteric Buddhism and strictly prohibited it; as a result, Esoteric Buddhism disappeared from China.

Thereafter, people instead went to Japan and Tibet to study it, calling these Eastern Esoteric Buddhism and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism. Is this not lamentable? Down to the present day, Buddhist practitioners value the Way still less and spiritual powers all the more. They mistakenly believe that realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature means manifesting great spiritual powers, and that without such powers one

has not realized the mind and seen one's true nature. This wrong view misleads not only oneself but others as well.

They do not realize that, although the principle awakened to through realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is no different from that realized by all Buddhas, the habitual defilements accumulated through kalpas and many lives are deep and cannot suddenly be eliminated. At this point, one is only a Buddha at the causal stage, like a newborn infant: though also a human being, it cannot yet function. One must cultivate on the basis of awakening, diligently eliminate habitual tendencies, and nurture the sacred embryo; only then do spiritual powers begin to develop.

The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says: "In principle, awakening is sudden, and through awakening one simultaneously eliminates it; in phenomena, one removes it gradually, exhausting it according to stages." The Mahāvairocana Sūtra says: "When a bodhisattva abides here and diligently removes the five obscurations, the five supernormal powers will soon all manifest." Regrettably, many children of the Buddha do not understand this principle. They seek only spiritual powers, cater to popular tastes, and flaunt their own abilities. Consequently, students of Esoteric Buddhism rise en masse to imitate this error, attending only to methods for peripheral manifestations and miraculous transformations while disregarding the great Dharma of realizing the fundamental essence and transcending birth and death. This is truly lamentable!

Each school within Esoteric Buddhism has its own supreme and excellent Dharma, whose powers and functions are all inconceivable. Practicing according to them, one can gain genuine benefit and realize the fruition of sagehood. Yet among them, none is more complete, perfect, or excellent than the Dzogchen (Great Perfection) teaching of the Red School. It is the highest dharma gate in the stages of the nine vehicles, with none above it.

The preliminary approach to this teaching—the Mahāmudrā of the Ganges—is equivalent to the Chan school's direct instruction in mind Dharma, though more complete than Chan. The first half of Dzogchen, the practice of Trekchö (cutting through), with its seal of the three emptinesses, is equivalent to Chan's seeing one's true nature; its latter half, Tögal, in which the body transforms into a rainbow body, is equivalent to Chan's further ascent.

Chan, however, relies solely on realization through one's own power, has few expedient means for guiding practitioners, and yields results slowly. Esoteric Buddhism, in addition to one's own power, also gains the empowering strength of the Buddhas and has various extraordinary expedient means for guidance. The excellence of its guidance resembles the principle of modern lasers and is highly scientific; thus its results come quickly and its benefits are swiftly obtained.

Although some elements of the great Dharma of Esoteric Buddhism have already been incorporated into Chan and Pure Land practices, if practitioners also cultivate Esoteric Dharma in addition to Chan and Pure Land, thereby making up for their deficiencies, they will progress more quickly and achieve greater results. Master Hanshan said: "Those whose Buddha-recitation lacks efficacy may practice mantra recitation (that is, reciting mantras). By relying on the power of the Buddha's mind-seal, they can achieve twice the result with half the effort."

Chan practitioners in particular may investigate a rigid huatou without the hammering and pressing guidance of a true master, receive no response at all, and waste their energies. It is better to switch to Esoteric practice and rely on the Buddha's compassionate power, whereby awakening and accomplishment are easier. Yet if practitioners find the complexity of ritual, the intricacy of visualization, and the slowness of preliminary practices burdensome, nothing is better than practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma.

Although Dzogchen is complete and without deficiency, one must first undertake preliminary practices before practicing it; and when practicing Trekchö, one must also perform various form-based visualizations. It is complex and elaborate, unlike the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, which is simple, direct, and easy to practice.

The Heart-of-Heart Dharma is formless esoteric practice: direct and straightforward, requiring no transition from form-based to formless practice. It requires neither preliminary practices nor visualizations, and directly realizes the formless source of mind. It is truly the simplest, easiest, swiftest, and most wondrous Dharma within Esoteric Buddhism. But for those whose disposition inclines toward visualization and who prefer to begin with forms—such as the yidam, seed syllables, and the three channels and five chakras—Dzogchen is more suitable.

The Heart-of-Heart Dharma belongs to the Tibetan Red School and also has a transmission in Eastern Esoteric Buddhism. In the past, the master Nona transmitted it in Shanghai to Yuan Xilian. Regrettably, because this Dharma belongs to the higher formless esoteric teachings and, in Tibet, could be transmitted only after twenty or thirty years of form-based esoteric practice, it was not widely propagated. This great Dharma nearly vanished without trace.

This Dharma is now able to be widely disseminated entirely because Acharya Dayu practiced the Pratyutpanna Samādhi on Mount Lu, endured great hardships, and entered deeply into samādhi. Samantabhadra Bodhisattva appeared to him, conferred empowerment, and transmitted the teaching, telling him that The Buddha-Heart Sūtra, Also Corresponding to the Great Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī, found in the Esoteric section of Japan's Taishō Revised Tripiṭaka, was this Dharma's root text and could be consulted in detail.

Having received the Dharma and succeeded in its practice, Master Dayu deeply felt the decline of the Buddhadharma and the difficulty of repaying the Buddha's kindness. Sparing no effort, he descended the mountain and transmitted it widely. Thereafter, Master Wang Xianglu received the Dharma and transmitted it, and disciples who received it spread throughout nearly the whole country; thus the Dharma began to flourish in the world. This Dharma is simple and swift. Students all call it Chan-Esoteric Buddhism; the expression may seem inappropriate, but its meaning is indeed comparable. Perhaps the proper time and conditions had arrived, and the Dharma was meant to arise and flourish throughout the land for the benefit of vast numbers of sentient beings.

The Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma employs six mudrās and one mantra, empowered by the three mysteries; it may be practiced with or without setting up an altar. During practice, the hands form mudrās and one recites the mantra. One does not visualize, but turns hearing inward to uphold in the mind the soundless sound of the secret mantra, much like Buddha-recitation contemplation. When holding the mantra, one performs vajra recitation: the lips move but no sound comes from the mouth, continuously and without interruption. Because one receives the Buddha's empowering strength, entering samādhi is extremely swift.

Such practice neither harms the vital energy nor injures the blood; indeed, it is a marvelous method of nourishing the body. Vocal recitation harms the vital energy, while silent recitation harms the blood. But in vajra recitation, the mind recites and the ears hear; attention does not race outward, but continues in one unbroken thread. The mind becomes clear and the will concentrated, vital energy and blood are harmonized, one enters samādhi peacefully, and one's spirit is bright and robust and one's body healthy. Herein is established the foundation for realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature.

This Dharma may be practiced in one or two sessions daily; there are also methods of seven-day retreats and nine-session retreats. Each session lasts two hours. The hands must maintain the mudrā without releasing it, and one must recite the mantra without stopping. One must not release the mudrā and leave the seat midway; otherwise, the session does not count and must be begun again from the start. If one's capacity is suitable and one can practice continuously without interruption, then after completing one thousand sessions one will certainly realize the mind and see one's true nature. After seeing one's true nature, one manifests function from the essence and tempers habitual tendencies, thereby following the same course as Chan. If one further diligently practices Tögal of Dzogchen, transforming the body into a rainbow body and realizing the fruition of Buddhahood is not difficult.

Because the Heart-of-Heart and Dzogchen teachings discussed above are Esoteric Dharma, they may not be publicly taught or shown without empowerment; therefore, their methods of practice will not be explained in detail. Those with aspiration should seek a master for empowerment and transmission, then practice accordingly; there will naturally be a proper way forward.

All sentient beings are originally Buddhas and fundamentally need not practice any Dharma to realize Buddhahood. Yet because their accumulated defilements are deep and heavy, even when a person of clear insight directly points out the nature of mind, they are unwilling to trust and take it up themselves. Thus they cannot avoid relying on Dharma practice, as one uses yellow leaves to stop a child from crying. Among the various practices, moreover, differences in skillful and expedient means result in differences of speed.

Those who investigate Chan often require several decades before gaining some response; some even remain confused and distressed throughout their lives without awakening. Practitioners of other schools likewise often do not dare speak of realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature; this is especially so in the Pure Land school.

The Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma described above may indeed be called most expedient and swift; nevertheless, one must still undertake a thousand meditation sessions, requiring about three years, before directly seeing one's Original Face. This is speaking of the slowest cases; those of sharp faculties who attain realization quickly need not complete all one thousand sessions. To speak frankly, this is like an innocent person being put in shackles, or taking a needless detour when there is no need to travel at all. Only when the bottom drops out of the bucket and one sees one's original nature does one realize that it was present and complete from the very beginning, and that this was an unnecessary extra step.

For one who sees the nature through a single thought turning the light inward, one who sees the nature after practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma for a thousand sessions, and one who sees the nature after investigating Chan for decades, the difference in the time required is immense. Yet taking more needless detours is not without its compensations and benefits. After traveling many such detours, one's legs have, after all, been strengthened.

Those who have not taken such needless detours have weak legs. Once they set out on the road—that is, when they encounter circumstances and conditions—they immediately find that their strength falls short. Why is this? Although the principle realized by the three kinds of people mentioned above is no different, there is a great difference in the power of its application.

In one case, realization comes very easily. Having undergone no training in meditative stability, the mind constantly wavers with circumstances and cannot master itself; therefore, its power is insufficient. In the other case, one has long practiced sitting meditation and has deeply cultivated meditative stability, investigation, tempering, vigilant awareness, and contemplation. Once awakening occurs, one can be free and at ease, without being swayed by the defiling circumstances of the world. As the ancient worthies said, “Effort is never wasted, and the Dharma is never bestowed casually!” Xuedou said: “For decades I have endured hardship, entering the blue dragon’s cave time and again for you. What hardship! What hardship! It is worth recounting. Clear-eyed monastics, do not take it lightly!” This verse expresses precisely this point.

Practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma for approximately three years, and relying on the Buddha’s empowering support, one can awaken. Although this takes somewhat more time than seeing the nature through a single thought turning the light inward, compared with those who labor diligently in Chan investigation for thirty years, it requires only one-tenth of the effort while yielding the same power of application and results. We descendants living in this Dharma-ending age, apart from deeply rejoicing at the blessings and virtues that have enabled us to encounter this great Dharma, and profoundly thanking the Buddhas and bodhisattvas for their compassionate grace, what more is there to say?

Furthermore, besides enabling one to realize the mind, see one’s true nature, and attain accomplishment in this very life, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma also enables one to make vows for rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. If one’s Buddha-recitation lacks efficacy and sacred visions do not appear, one may rely on this Dharma for practice in order to realize samādhi; then rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is assured. Although this Dharma is called Esoteric Buddhism, it is in fact a perfectly wondrous great Dharma that unites Chan and Pure Land in a single practice. Those with aspiration should investigate and practice it.

Finally, I earnestly advise fellow practitioners of Esoteric Buddhism: never use esoteric practices for criminal activities and thereby incur grave punishment for your offenses. Esoteric Buddhism does indeed possess various profound and mysterious supernormal powers and wondrous functions. But one must understand that any powers acquired through the practice of even the most wondrous Dharma are not true powers; they cannot be compared with the powers realized through the manifestation of the wisdom-light that exhausts the outflows.

Such powers acquired through practice according to a Dharma are merely dependent powers. Like the occult arts of non-Buddhist paths, they can only please and impress ignorant petty people and cannot enter refined society. Even if one can pass oneself off as holy for a time and gain a little fame, reputation, profit, and

offerings, when death comes, not only will those supernormal powers vanish, leaving one without support, but one will also undergo terrible and severe karmic retribution in accordance with one's karma.

True Cultivation After Awakening

Before realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, whatever dharma gate you cultivate or however diligently you exert yourself, you cannot escape the category of "blind cultivation and aimless practice." Without awakening to the true mind, one cannot be free of doubt about the practice. Though one may strive diligently, doubts remain as inner obstructions, and the appearance of unease cannot be avoided. This appearance of unease is itself the root of birth and death; therefore, however deep one's counteractive practice may be, it is not true cultivation.

Chan Master Puzhao says in Secrets of Cultivating the Mind: "Practice before awakening, though one strives diligently and never forgets to cultivate and permeate oneself thought after thought, still gives rise to doubt at every turn and cannot be free of obstruction. It is as though something were lodged in the breast; the appearance of unease is always before one. As time passes and the counteractive practice matures, one seems to experience lightness and ease amid the adventitious defilements of body and mind. Yet despite this ease and lightness, the root of doubt has not been cut off. Like grass pressed beneath a stone, one still cannot be at ease within the realm of birth and death." Therefore it is said: "Practice before awakening is not yet genuine practice."

Yet no one can avoid passing through this period of blind cultivation and aimless practice. Once the bottom of the bucket has been knocked out and one clearly recognizes one's original nature, one returns home by the way itself. According with conditions, one brings habitual tendencies to an end; naturally cultivating samādhi and wisdom together, one is spontaneous and uncontrived, with activity and stillness alike Chan. Only then is this true cultivation without cultivation.

Secrets of Cultivating the Mind says: "Even those of inferior capacity, after seeing their nature, may have dense afflictions and deeply rooted habitual defilements. In encountering circumstances, feelings arise with every thought; when conditions are met, they take each thought as something real. They may even be confused and deluded by circumstances and conditions, thereby obscuring their original nature. Although they employ various skillful countermeasures to remove inferior habits and eliminate defilements, and their cultivation still involves deliberate effort, thought after thought they remain free from doubt and do not fall into lingering obstruction. As time passes, and their strength reaches its utmost and their practice becomes pure, they naturally accord with the wondrous nature of spontaneity,

resting in naturally occurring quiescent knowing. In this, they are no different from those of superior capacity."

Therefore Buddhist practitioners must first take realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature as their aim. Only after realizing the mind and then eliminating habitual tendencies does one engage in true cultivation. This is also why I urgently proclaim that there is no need to investigate rigid, lifeless huatou. Instead, a teacher should directly point out mind and intrinsic nature, enabling students to awaken immediately; only then should they begin true cultivation, so as not to squander their time in vain.

Someone may ask: "To realize the mind and see one's true nature is to become a sage. Not only would one no longer need further cultivation, but one should also manifest all manner of spiritual powers and transformations, greatly differing from ordinary people—the so-called great capacity and great functioning, with transformations unfathomable. Why, then, do you instead say that only after awakening does one truly cultivate?"

I reply: "Practitioners of the Way today have two errors. First, they think that after awakening one is already a sage and should manifest all kinds of spiritual transformations. If one cannot manifest them, they conclude that one has not awakened, but engages in mere verbal Chan, speaking emptily about truth. Consequently, their minds become discouraged and they fall into the error of believing themselves to have no share in it. Such people are everywhere."

Second, they say that the Chan school originally teaches no cultivation, no attainment, and no realization; once awakened, one is finished, so why cultivate and refine oneself further? Thus, although they may have awakened at the level of principle, their habitual tendencies remain unchanged. As the days and months pass, they continue as before to wander in birth and death and inevitably undergo rebirth in the six realms. This point has already been discussed, and it may seem unnecessary to say more. Yet because it bears immensely on a practitioner's success or failure, and because it is precisely the root of the present-day practitioner's misunderstanding, I do not begrudge the extra words but shall explain it further.

Secrets of Cultivating the Mind says: "There are many gates of entry into the Way, but in essentials they do not go beyond the two gates of sudden awakening and gradual cultivation." It also says: "These two gates of sudden and gradual are the standards followed by a thousand sages. All the sages of the past first awakened and then cultivated; through cultivation they realized. Spiritual powers and transformations arise through cultivation based on awakening, manifesting gradually through repeated permeation. This does not mean that they appear at the moment of awakening."

Chan Master Guifeng said: “Recognizing that an ice pond is wholly water, one relies on the sun’s warmth to melt it. Realizing that an ordinary being is precisely a Buddha, one relies on the power of the Dharma to cultivate and permeate oneself. When ice melts, the water flows and moistens, and only then does its power to irrigate and cleanse become evident. When delusion is exhausted, the mind becomes empty and unobstructed, and only then does the function of spiritual illumination emerge. Spiritual powers and transformations in practical affairs cannot be accomplished in a single day; they manifest through gradual permeation.”

Yangshan instructed the assembly: “I now tell you plainly: do not try to grasp this through concepts. Simply cultivate in accordance with reality within the ocean of your own nature. Do not seek the three insights and six supernormal powers. Why not? These are peripheral matters for sages. At present, you need only recognize the mind and penetrate intrinsic nature. Once you attain the root, do not worry about the branches; later, in due time, they will be naturally complete. If you have not attained the root, but merely imitate others with discriminating feelings, you will ultimately gain nothing. Even if you gain something, it will not be genuine, and you will be liable to become a demon.”

From the passages cited above, we may understand sudden awakening as follows: when ordinary beings are deluded, they falsely take the four great elements to be the body and deluded thoughts to be the mind. They do not know that their intrinsic nature is the true dharmakāya, or that their own numinous knowing is the true Buddha. Ever seeking the Buddha outside the mind, they run east and west. Then they suddenly receive from a good spiritual friend an entranceway; in a single thought, they turn the light inward, see their own original nature, and recognize their own original mind. This mind and intrinsic nature are originally without afflictions, originally without arising or ceasing, inherently complete and inherently sufficient, no different from all Buddhas. Moreover, from ordinary being to Buddhahood there are no stages or gradations. Therefore it is called sudden awakening.

Although it is called sudden awakening, this pertains to the level of principle. Habitual defilements in practical affairs have accumulated over many lives and kalpas, through birth and death; attachment is firmly entrenched and cannot suddenly be eliminated. Therefore one must cultivate in accordance with awakening and gradually remove habitual tendencies. Only when delusion is exhausted do spiritual powers manifest. They certainly do not appear at the moment of suddenly awakening to principle. Thus practitioners of the Way must understand the process and distinguish what comes first from what comes later. They must never doubt themselves because supernormal powers have not yet developed, much less doubt others. If they conclude that no one can realize the Way and seek another path

instead, they will enter a mistaken road; even after kalpas as numerous as motes of dust, they will be unable to realize the Way.

Moreover, whether or not spiritual powers manifest is insufficient evidence of whether one has realized the Way. First, there are many kinds of such powers: some are acquired through Esoteric Buddhism; some are conveyed through possession by spirits or ghosts; some are karmic rewards from cultivation and permeation in past lives; and so forth. One cannot say that all such people have realized the Way.

Such spiritual powers may depend upon something and thus not be genuine powers, or they may merely resemble true powers. Once the physical body decays and what they depend on is lost, they disappear. Second, the ancient worthies spoke of the distinction between awakening first and then developing powers, and developing powers first and then awakening. One cannot say that the development of powers itself constitutes realization of the Way.

For example, before Chan Master Poshan of the Ming dynasty awakened while practicing the Way at Tiantong, he was able to send forth his spirit and steal ducks from local villagers, roaming freely in playful samādhi. Later, when this came to light, Chan Master Miyun Wu rebuked him: “Though you are not without playful spiritual powers, you have not even dreamed of the Buddhadharma!” Poshan knelt and requested instruction. After further vigorous investigation, he finally awakened.

In modern times, sentient beings’ capacities have become still more inferior and their habitual obstacles still heavier. Of those who wish to develop powers first and awaken later, not one person in ten million succeeds. Therefore, after awakening, we must cultivate in accordance with awakening, gradually remove habitual tendencies, and gradually develop spiritual powers. All the former sages and patriarchs through the ages were thus. Therefore, the two gates of sudden awakening and gradual cultivation are the standards for Buddhist disciples, which practitioners of every school should uphold and observe.

Someone may say: “Principle is precisely phenomena, and phenomena are precisely principle; principle and phenomena are nondual. If one suddenly awakens to principle, phenomena should correspond. If one cannot penetrate matters in actual practice and lingering obstructions remain, how can one claim to have awakened to true principle?”

I reply: “Principle and phenomena are neither one nor different. Phenomena are established through principle, and principle is revealed through phenomena; principle does not depart from phenomena, nor do phenomena depart from principle. In terms of this inseparability, they are not different. Yet true principle is formless, while wondrous functioning accords with conditions and responds to the myriad kinds of beings. Delusion falsely establishes empty appearances, which

nevertheless have forms. In terms of form and formlessness, therefore, they are not one."

Now, although one who has realized the Way clearly understands that one's own empty and quiescent numinous knowing is the true Buddha, habitual defilements accumulated through many lives are deep and cannot be suddenly eliminated. When matters arise, the mind may still stir; when circumstances are encountered, it is difficult to be instantly without thoughts. Yet when thoughts and mental movements arise, such a person is not like one who is blind: unaware that the objects of the senses are fundamentally empty, clinging and grasping, wandering and forgetting the way back. Rather, when a preceding thought moves, the following thought immediately recognizes it and at once sweeps it away.

Such a person merely bears traces of arising and ceasing compared with one whose mind does not stir at all, and their strength is somewhat weaker. But if they continuously safeguard realization and remain aware and illuminating at every moment, then as time passes and their practice deepens, they will naturally become continuous and undivided. The ox-herding practice of the patriarchs throughout the ages is the model for such post-awakening cultivation.

An ancient worthy said: "Though sudden awakening is equal to Buddhahood, habitual tendencies from many lives are deep. Though the wind has ceased, the waves still surge; though principle is manifest, thoughts still intrude!" Therefore, after awakening one must constantly observe and examine. Whenever deluded thoughts arise, do not follow them at all. Diminish them again and again until reaching non-contrivance; only then is it ultimate. Among the good spiritual friends of the world, those able to manifest spiritual powers and transformations in practical affairs have not acquired them in a single day; they manifest through gradual permeation.

Moreover, spiritual powers are peripheral matters for sages, and those of profound realization do not value them greatly. Even if such powers manifest, they do not wish to use them. If one has not attained the root—realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature—but seeks only the branches—the development of spiritual powers—then not only will one fail to realize the Way, but one will also be liable to become a demon. Thus one must be careful.

Buddhist disciples today often measure others by spiritual powers. They mistakenly suppose that at the instant of awakening, immeasurable wondrous functions, spiritual powers, and transformations should immediately appear. If no spiritual powers or transformations appear, then even someone with a clear and penetrating dharma eye is judged not to have awakened. Such people are truly deluded persons who know neither root nor branch and understand neither what comes first nor

what comes later. They become discouraged themselves and also disbelieve others, thereby cutting off the seed-nature of Buddhahood. Nothing could be more grievous or sorrowful.

As for the second contemporary error—the belief that once awakened, one is finished, with no cultivation, no attainment, and no realization—compared with the view that spiritual powers arise as soon as one awakens, it may seem to involve some awakening. Yet because its understanding is not thorough, it enters a mistaken path. Its error is no different from that of those who have not awakened, and may even be more harmful. The former merely become discouraged, distrust themselves, and distrust others; once the proper time and conditions arrive, they may still break through their delusion and enter the correct path. But the latter suppose themselves awakened. Their wrong views are deeply rooted; they dispense with later cultivation, continue wandering as before, and sink ever deeper into saṃsāra, unable to free themselves.

As stated above, no cultivation, no attainment, and no realization pertain to the level of principle, and are also the final words of one who has arrived home. They are certainly not a state reached at the instant of awakening. Especially in this latter age of Dharma decline, people have inferior capacities and heavy obstacles; still less can they reach the stage of effortless functioning without further cultivation after awakening. Those who say that no further cultivation is needed and that one is finished as soon as one awakens are either mad or foolish; they truly cannot be trusted.

All sentient beings inherently possess the Tathāgata's wisdom and virtues. Yet because they are deluded and unaware, they take the false for the true, create karma and undergo retribution, revolve through the six realms, and become sentient beings.

Though among sentient beings, intrinsic nature is never lost. With a single awakening, one is no different from all Buddhas and does not depend on cultivation for completion; therefore it is said that there is no cultivation. All appearances are false and illusory; fundamentally there is empty quiescence and not a single dharma; therefore it is said that there is no attainment. At the ultimate stage, even Buddhahood is not established; therefore it is said that there is no realization. Yet while deluded habits have not been removed, and one grasps at conditions and clings to them, revolving in birth and death, one is still not other than a sentient being.

Therefore, one must cultivate and permeate oneself thought after thought, remaining aware and illuminating mind after mind. After great awakening, one cuts off evil while not cutting it off, cultivates good while not cultivating it, enters the hall

and the inner chamber, returns home and sits securely. Only then is one, as it is said, “A carefree person of the Way, beyond learning and contrivance,” and this is the proper time for no cultivation, no attainment, and no realization. Before reaching this stage, to speak grandly of no cultivation, no attainment, and no realization—is this not deceiving the worthy and deluding the sages, thereby bringing sorrow upon oneself?

Someone may ask: “There have been, since ancient times, those who awaken suddenly, practice suddenly, and realize suddenly. Do such people not simply cease after one awakening? Must they too cultivate gradually after awakening? If there were such people in ancient times, surely there must still be some today.”

Answer: Only persons of the very highest capacities can enter through sudden awakening, sudden practice, and sudden realization. Examined carefully, the lofty and profound capacities of such people arise because, in past lives, they practiced on the basis of awakening and gradually accumulated the effects of that practice. When the causes and conditions mature in this life, they can awaken as soon as they hear, completing everything at once.

On the surface, this may appear to be sudden awakening, sudden practice, and sudden realization; in fact, it too is a capacity of practice after prior awakening. An ancient worthy said, “Today’s suddenness was also yesterday’s gradualness.” As for students today, their capacities are meager and inferior. Unless they are great bodhisattvas returned to this world, it is truly difficult for them to awaken suddenly, practice suddenly, and realize suddenly. Even if one or two persons of great capacity attain a thousand awakenings upon hearing once, and complete everything in a single awakening, they still cannot be without practice, attainment, and realization. For the habitual influences of ignorance cannot be exhausted in one lifetime. Moreover, the moment one speaks of “no practice, no attainment, and no realization,” one has already fallen into practice, attainment, and realization.

Secrets of Cultivating the Mind says: “Since beginningless kalpas, ordinary beings have revolved through the six realms, tenaciously clinging to the appearance of self. Their deluded thoughts are inverted, and the seeds and habits of ignorance have long become their nature. Although in this life they may suddenly awaken to their own nature—originally empty and quiescent, no different from the Buddha—these old habits are difficult to cut off all at once. Thus, when they encounter favorable or adverse circumstances, anger and delight, judgments of right and wrong, blaze up and cease as before. Adventitious defilements and afflictions are no different from what they were previously. If one does not diligently cultivate through the imbibing influence of prajñā, how can one counteract them, purify and clarify them, and reach the place of great rest and complete cessation?”

Chan Master Dahui Zonggao said: “People of sharp faculties often settle this matter without expending much effort, and then give rise to a complacent mind, no longer cultivating or refining themselves. As the days and months pass, they drift about as before and cannot avoid rebirth in saṃsāra. How can one, on the basis of one occasion of awakening, dispense with subsequent practice?”

Therefore, after awakening one must constantly observe and examine oneself, never treating this lightly or negligently. When a deluded thought suddenly arises, one may become sharply alert or bring forth Buddha-remembrance, until one reaches non-contrivance; only then is it ultimate. Thus, the principle of sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation is like the two wheels of a cart: neither can be absent.

Since sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation is the rule of practice and the bridge to realizing the Way for Buddhist disciples, how should one practice? And how does this differ from practice before awakening? Let us explain as follows:

1. Practice after awakening cannot be discussed in a single, uniform way; it must be determined according to the depth or shallowness of the student’s deluded habits and the weight or lightness of afflictions. Those whose habitual obstructions are slight need not apply countermeasures. They need only observe and examine in accordance with circumstances: when a thought arises, immediately become aware of it; upon awareness, turn it into emptiness. By practicing in this way thought after thought, they will naturally and gradually attain hundreds and thousands of samādhis.

As Secrets of Cultivating the Mind says: “Simply observe that delusion has no basis, and do not abide in thought after thought. The three realms are flowers in empty space, like smoke swept away by the wind; the illusory six sense objects are like ice melted by boiling water. Adventitious defilements and afflictions will naturally all become clarified butter.” If students can practice in this way thought after thought, without forgetting this care and with samādhi and wisdom held equally, attachment and aversion will naturally grow faint, and wisdom will naturally increase and unfold. If the subtle continuous stream is cut off forever, and the great wisdom of perfect enlightenment alone remains bright and clear, they will manifest countless transformation bodies, responding to potentials and answering calls throughout the lands of the ten directions without hindrance or obstruction.

Secrets of Cultivating the Mind says: “Though one cultivates the myriad practices, take only no-thought as the principle. The conduct of herding the ox after awakening, taught by good spiritual friends throughout the world, involves subsequent practice only after sudden awakening has already occurred. Deluded thoughts are originally empty, and mind-nature is originally pure. Though one

eliminates evil habits, there are no evil habits to eliminate; though one diligently cultivates merit and wisdom, there is no merit or wisdom to cultivate. To practice yet be without practice, to eliminate yet be without elimination—this is true practice and true elimination."

It further says: "When seeing forms and hearing sounds, simply be thus (that is, when seeing forms and hearing sounds, simply be like a bright mirror reflecting things, or wind passing through trees, without entertaining other thoughts). When putting on clothes and eating, simply be thus; when defecating and urinating, simply be thus; when dealing with people and things, simply be thus. Even in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down; whether speaking or silent, joyful or angry—at all times, in every single instance, be thus. Like an empty boat riding the waves, rising and falling with them, yet not abiding in thought after thought; like running water winding around mountains, meeting bends and straights, yet with each moment of mind without knowing.

Today, at ease and allowing things to take their course; tomorrow, allowing things to take their course and at ease. Follow all conditions, without obstruction or hindrance. Be straightforward and without artifice; let seeing and hearing be ordinary. Then no speck of dust remains to become an object of opposition, so what need is there for the labor of dispelling and clearing? No single thought gives rise to emotional attachment, so there is no need to rely on the power of forgetting conditions."

This effortless, quiescent knowing is originally cultivation in non-contrivance and is in truth equivalent to no cultivation. There is no need to start afresh and cling to a method of practice; nor is there any need to mentally maintain visualizations or take stillness as one's practice. How vastly different this is from the practice before awakening, when one does not understand the reason, stubbornly clings to dharma appearances, rigidly adheres to ritual forms, greedily seeks merit and virtue, pursues assigned tasks, and practices as though wearing cangues and shackles!

2. As for those whose habitual defilements are deep and whose power of ignorance is great—whose minds cannot help being stirred and shifted by favorable and adverse states, good and evil circumstances, and who lack tranquil composure—there must be effort in dispelling deluded conditions and applying countermeasures.

Among the counteractive methods, if restlessness is strong, use the corresponding power of samādhi to gather in the scattered mind; if dullness is strong, use the gate of wisdom to contemplate emptiness (for the appropriate practice, see the following chapter, "Ten Dharma Gates of Practice"). One must ensure that samādhi and

wisdom are held equally, that movement and stillness both vanish, and that one enters non-contrivance; only then is it ultimate.

Secrets of Cultivating the Mind says: “First use the gate of samādhi to gather in restlessness, so that the mind does not follow conditions and accords with original quiescence. Next use the gate of wisdom to awaken one from dullness: discriminate dharmas and contemplate emptiness, thereby according with original knowing. Use samādhi to treat confused thoughts and wisdom to treat indeterminate states. When dullness and confusion both vanish, and the work of counteraction is complete, then in the face of objects, thought after thought returns to the principle; when encountering conditions, moment after moment the mind accords with the Way. Only when the two are cultivated effortlessly is one truly without affairs.”

Someone may ask: “Such counteractive cultivation is no different from the gradual practice of inferior capacities before awakening. Why then speak of sudden awakening?”

Answer: Such people have inferior capacities and heavy habitual tendencies, with deep obstructions and thick defilements. Although they too awaken to the fact that their own nature is pure and empty-quiescent, complete with all virtues and no different from the Buddha, when confronted with circumstances they give rise to emotional attachment; when they encounter conditions, they become obstructed. Dullness and confusion shift them about, obscuring their clear, quiescent, ever-present knowing. Without the effort of counteraction to harmonize dullness and confusion, not only can they not enter non-contrivance, but they instead fall into “delusion after awakening.” This is something of which one must be especially careful.

Here are one or two koans of delusion after awakening, to warn those who, after awakening, do not diligently undertake actual cultivation:

1. Betraying One’s Teacher

The practitioner Xian had long studied under Xuedou. After receiving the Dharma, Xuedou intended to appoint him abbot of Jin’e, but Xian refused. Later, when he emerged to establish a teaching hall, he saw that the reputation and influence of Venerable Yuan of Deshan surpassed those of Xuedou, and so changed his lineage affiliation to inherit from Venerable Yuan. When he sent messengers bearing letters to the various mountains, an old woman at the foot of a mountain happily asked, “For whom does Head Seat Xian burn incense now that he has emerged to teach?” The special messenger replied, “Venerable Yuan of Deshan.” The old woman cursed him: “Xuedou poured out his guts teaching Chan to you, and only then do you have what you have today. How can you so repay kindness with ingratitude and betray virtue?”

Elder Shengjue of Kaisheng in Hezhou first studied under Tiejiao Fu of Changlu for a long time, without attaining anything. Later he went to the seat of Wuzu Yan at Dongshan and received the Dharma. When he emerged to teach and resided at Kaisheng, he saw that the Dharma seat at Changlu was flourishing, and so changed his lineage affiliation to Fu, without acknowledging the source of his realization. While offering incense, he suddenly felt as though his chest were being pounded. An abscess then formed at the painful spot and opened into a hole. He made a plug of frankincense cakes to fill it, but it did not heal over time, and he eventually died.

2. Betraying a Friend

Qing, the monastery librarian and a native of Shu, was well known in Chan monasteries. One day he and Master Xiu traveled together to the capital to visit Chan Master Yuantong of Fayun. Upon arriving at Fayun, Xiu was permitted to enter the hall and register as a resident, but Qing was not granted permission. Qing was at Zhihai when he happened to fall ill. Xiu wished to visit him, but no leave was granted at the mountain gate, so he secretly went to Zhihai to see Qing. Qing instead wrote to inform Yuantong that Xiu had gone in and out in violation of the rules.

When Yuantong learned of this, he fiercely rebuked him during the evening assembly: “For the sake of Dharma friendship, he risked leaving the monastery to inquire after your illness, yet you instead wrote a letter accusing him. How could this be the conduct of an upright and honorable person?” On hearing this, Qing stopped breathing. Everyone in the Chan monasteries said that Qing died after a single rebuke from Yuantong.

3. Rebelling Against One’s Teacher

Attendant Ping of Dayang was an outstanding disciple of Chan Master Ming’an of the Caodong school. One day Chan Master Guangzhao of Langya came to visit. Ming’an said to him, “The one who will revive the Caodong lineage will be either Yuan or Jue.” Guangzhao said, “There is Attendant Ping.” Ming’an replied, “Ping’s old habits are deep,” and pointed to his chest, saying, “This place is not good either.”

He then pinched the space between his thumb and forefinger and showed it, saying, “Ping will later die here.” After Ming’an passed away, Ping lived at Dayang and planned to seize the gold and silver objects that Li Hewen, a military commissioner, had offered to his teacher during his lifetime. He did not hesitate to destroy his teacher’s stūpa. Although the senior elders of the mountain earnestly remonstrated with him, he would not listen. When the stūpa was opened, his teacher’s appearance was as lifelike as ever, and though the firewood had been exhausted, his body remained solemn and unchanged.

Everyone was astonished, but Ping further broke open his teacher's skull, added oil and firewood, and before long reduced him to ashes. The community reported the matter to the authorities, and Ping was convicted of plotting to take the objects in the stūpa, of filial impiety, and was returned to lay status. Since his character was improper, all the monasteries abandoned him and would have nothing to do with him. Ping wandered without support. Later, at a three-way crossroads, he was eaten by a tiger. In the end, he could not escape Ming'an's prediction conveyed by the fork-shaped gesture. How tragic!

Such koans are too numerous to enumerate. All concern those who, after awakening, did not rely on countermeasures and diligent cultivation. Their accumulated habits were deep; they obscured their innate moral sense, became moved by profit, and forgot kindness and betrayed righteousness—hence these outcomes. Yet although people may indulge their violent, stubborn, treacherous, and cunning intelligence, how can they expect the Dharma-protecting deities to be lenient with them? That they do not meet a good end is only fitting.

One should understand that although one temporarily regulates habitual tendencies through counteractive practice, one has first suddenly awakened to the fact that mind-nature is originally pure and that afflictions are originally empty. Therefore, one does not cling to methods in practice and fall into the inferior view of practice, attainment, and realization. Thus, thought after thought returns to the principle, and moment after moment the mind accords with the Way, without losing the intent of sudden awakening. Conversely, when practice comes before awakening, because one has not seen one's true nature, even though one cultivates steadily, thought after thought, doubt arises at every step.

One cannot be free and unhindered; at the same time, one clings to dharma appearances, grasps at merit and virtue, and cannot transcend birth and death. Thus, although the same counteractive dharma gates are used, for one who has awakened they are like lodging temporarily on a journey—a provisional expedient. One does not fall into attachment to dharmas; as time passes, one naturally accords with the wonder of the Way and accomplishes unsurpassed bodhi. This is no different from those of superior capacity with shallow habits, who practice without practice and do not practice yet practice. This too must be understood.

Consider also those who cultivate Pure Land Buddha-recitation. Before awakening, they do not know that thought after thought returns to the principle; they merely race outward in search, practicing while clinging to appearances. Some even cling to the appearance of merit and virtue, regarding greater quantity as superior, rushing to recite sūtras and mantras and thereby bringing on illness instead.

After awakening, they then know that mind itself is Buddha and Buddha itself is mind; Buddha-remembrance is mindfulness of mind, and mindfulness of mind is Buddha-remembrance. Thought after thought, they remember the Buddha; thought after thought, they awaken their original mind. This is what is meant by communion between mind and Buddha, becoming continuous and undivided.

Therefore, the ancient worthies said that only after realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature can one fully take up a single Buddha-name. Before awakening, one neither knows where Buddha-recitation comes to rest nor ceases to give rise to doubts at every turn, and thus cannot receive its true benefit. After awakening, one recognizes the mind's original source: to recite is all right, and not to recite is all right; there is no longer any question of reciting or not reciting. One neither clings to forms in seeking to recite nor deliberately avoids them by not reciting. All day long, one is utterly bare and unencumbered, carefree and at ease, adapting to conditions without hindrance. Only then can this truly be called uninterrupted pure mindfulness: not a single thought is other than a Buddha-thought.

There is much to learn from the expression "uninterrupted pure mindfulness." It is no different from the practice of safeguarding realization after awakening in the Chan school, and it is an indicator of the progress of those who practice Buddha-recitation. Though this may seem verbose, I shall briefly explain it below:

The two words "pure mindfulness" do not mean, as people generally imagine, that reciting the Buddha's name with a pure mind is itself pure mindfulness. Rather, only when one's Buddha-recitation has become thoroughly refined, so that the mind that recites and the Buddha who is recited both fall away at once, subject and object are both gone, and emptiness and presence alike are dissolved—only then is this right mindfulness called pure mindfulness.

As for "uninterrupted," there are further distinctions in depth of practice: continuity in stillness, continuity in activity, and being equally at ease in stillness and activity. These are analyzed below:

1. Continuity in stillness. When practitioners of Buddha-recitation reach the point at which subject and object both fall away and their intrinsic nature manifests, this is the initial manifestation of pure mindfulness. Thereafter, because their beginningless, age-long habitual tendency to cling to forms is deeply entrenched, it cannot manifest in every sitting. It may reappear only after several weeks, several months, or even a year. This depends entirely on the practitioner's capacity and on whether their cultivation is frequent or infrequent.

At this time, practitioners must exert themselves diligently, so that the interval gradually shortens: from a year to several months, then to one month, then to several days, until it manifests in every sitting. This is continuity in stillness. It

corresponds to the first stage of the Chan practice of “safeguarding,” and is called one-mindedness in principle.

2. Continuity in activity. If one can sustain continuity at all times in stillness but loses it again when disturbed by circumstances and conditions, this cannot be called true continuity. One must temper oneself amid everyday activity until, moving freely in every direction without obstruction and remaining unbound by favorable or adverse circumstances, one is just as in stillness: solitary luminosity remains clear and distinct, without any straying. Only then is there continuity in activity. Yet if one occasionally forgets oneself and is stirred by circumstances, one immediately becomes aware of it and returns to emptiness. This corresponds to the second stage of the Chan practice of “safeguarding,” and is called one-mindedness in phenomena.

3. Being equally at ease in stillness and activity. Whether in activity or stillness, there is no straying, nor is there any thought of holding on. One simply lets things function naturally. This corresponds to the first stage of the Chan practice of “letting be,” and is called one-mindedness of principle and phenomena.

4. Even continuity is unobtainable, and even the thought of deliberately not guarding the mind is gone. All the former mysterious and extraordinary experiences are swept away. One passes the whole day seeming foolish and dull, plain and without flavor; yet within this flavorlessness is the supreme flavor. This corresponds to the second stage of the Chan practice of “letting be,” and is called one-mindedness among phenomena. This is genuine uninterrupted pure mindfulness.

For the convenience of later students in selecting a method for practice, I excerpt below the ten methods of cultivation taught by Chan Master Yuan Zhi'ne, for everyone’s reference:

Question: In the Chan school, what method is used to treat the mind? Answer: The method of no-mind is used to treat the deluded mind. Question: If a person has no mind, then they are no different from grass and trees. Please explain the teaching of no-mind by means of an expedient. Answer: By “no-mind” here, we do not mean that there is no substance of mind; it is called no-mind only because there is nothing in the mind. It is like calling a bottle empty: because there is nothing in the bottle, it is called an empty bottle, not because the bottle itself does not exist.

Therefore, the patriarchs said: “Simply have no affair in the mind, and no clinging mind in affairs. Then you will naturally be empty yet numinous, still yet wondrous.” This is the essential point of this mind. Accordingly, no-mind means the absence of a deluded mind; it does not mean the absence of the wondrous functioning of the true mind. The methods taught by masters throughout the ages for cultivating no-mind have differed in kind. I shall now summarize their general purport and briefly clarify ten methods.

First is awareness. When practicing, ordinarily cut off thoughts and guard against their arising. The moment a thought arises, immediately illuminate and break through it. Once the preceding thought is illuminated and broken through, the following thought does not arise. Even this awareness and wisdom need not be applied. When both delusion and awareness are forgotten, this is called no-mind. Therefore, the patriarchs said: “Do not fear thoughts arising; fear only that awareness comes too late.” Another verse says: “Do not seek the true; only cease views.” This is the practice of awareness that ceases delusion.

Second is rest. When practicing, think neither of good nor of evil. When a thought arises, let it rest; when circumstances arise, let them cease. Thus it is said: “Go on like a single strip of white silk; go on cool and solitary; go on like an incense burner in an ancient temple.” Only when one has utterly cut off all fine discriminations and distinctions, becoming as if foolish and dull, is there a small measure of correspondence. This is the practice of resting the deluded mind.

Third is to dissolve the mind while preserving circumstances. When practicing, let all deluded thoughts cease. Do not attend to external circumstances; simply still the mind itself. Once the deluded mind has ceased, what harm can external circumstances do? This is the ancient method of taking away the person without taking away the circumstances. Layman Pang said: “Simply be without mind toward the myriad things; what harm if the myriad things constantly surround you?” This is the practice of dissolving the mind while preserving circumstances in order to cease delusion.

Fourth is to dissolve circumstances while preserving the mind. When practicing, contemplate all inner and outer circumstances as empty and quiescent, preserving only the one mind, standing alone and distinct. Thus the ancients said: “Do not keep company with the myriad things; do not stand in opposition to the various sense objects.” If the mind clings to circumstances, the mind is deluded; now that there are no circumstances, what delusion can there be? This is the ancient method of taking away circumstances without taking away the person. Thus it is said: “The flowers in the royal garden have already faded, yet carriages and horses are still crowded together.” This is the practice of dissolving circumstances while preserving the mind in order to cease delusion.

Fifth is to dissolve both mind and circumstances. When practicing, first empty and quiet the external circumstances, then extinguish the inner mind. Once both inner and outer mind and circumstances are quiet, where could delusion ultimately arise? Therefore, Guanxi said: “In the ten directions there are no walls; on all four sides there are no doors.” This is the patriarchs’ method of taking away both person and circumstances. Thus there is a saying: “Clouds scatter and waters flow away; people

are still, and heaven and earth are empty." This is the practice of dissolving both mind and circumstances in order to cease delusion.

Sixth is to preserve both circumstances and mind. When practicing, the mind abides in its own place and circumstances abide in their own place. When mind and circumstances stand in relation to one another, the mind does not pursue circumstances, and circumstances do not impinge upon the mind. Neither reaches the other, so deluded thoughts naturally do not arise and there is no hindrance to the Way. Therefore, the sūtra says: "Each dharma abides in its own dharma-position; the characteristics of the world ever abide." This is the patriarchs' method of taking away neither person nor circumstances. Thus there is a saying: "A single moon rises over the sea; in how many homes do people ascend their towers?" This is the practice of preserving both circumstances and mind in order to eliminate delusion.

Seventh is the totality of inner and outer. When practicing, regard mountains, rivers, the great earth, the sun, moon, and stars, the inner body and external objects, and all dharmas as being of one substance with the true mind—clear, empty, and luminous, without the slightest difference. The great thousandfold world and worlds as numerous as sands form an unbroken whole. From where, then, could a deluded mind arise? Thus Dharma Master Sengzhao said: "Heaven and earth have the same root as I; the myriad dharmas are one body with me." This is the practice of the totality of inner and outer in order to eliminate delusion.

Eighth is the total functioning of inner and outer. When practicing, regard all inner and outer body, mind, objects, and realms, as well as every movement, activity, and undertaking, as the wondrous functioning of the true mind. The moment any thought arises, this is the wondrous functioning appearing before one. Since everything is wondrous functioning, where can the deluded mind find a place to settle? Therefore, Yongjia said: "The actual nature of ignorance is none other than Buddha-nature; this illusory, empty body is itself the Dharma body." This is the practice of the total functioning of inner and outer in order to cease delusion.

Ninth is essence itself as function, and function itself as essence. When practicing, although one merges indistinguishably with the true essence, wholly empty and still, within it there is concealed numinous luminosity: this is essence itself as function. Within numinous luminosity, empty stillness is concealed: this is function itself as essence. Therefore, Yongjia said: "Awake and still—this is so; awake with deluded thoughts—this is not so. Still and awake—this is so; still in blank unconsciousness—this is not so." Since blank unconsciousness has no place within stillness, and scattered thinking is unnecessary within wakefulness, how could any deluded mind arise? This is the practice of essence itself as function and function itself as essence in order to eliminate delusion.

Tenth is to penetrate beyond essence and function. When practicing, do not distinguish inner from outer, nor discern east, west, south, or north. Regard the four sides and eight directions as a single great gate of liberation. Perfectly round and complete, essence and function are undivided; there is not the slightest gap or leakage, and the whole body forms an unbroken whole. Where, then, could delusion arise? The ancients said: “The whole body is without seam or fissure; above and below form one perfect roundness.” This is the practice of penetrating beyond essence and function in order to eliminate delusion.

Of these ten practices, one need not undertake them all. If one achieves success in a single gate, delusion will cease of itself and the true mind will appear. Whichever method accords with one’s past roots and affinities, one should practice it. This practice is effortless effort, not effort exerted by a deliberate mind. Even those who have not realized the true mind can readily see it directly by practicing in this way. This dharma gate of resting the deluded mind is of the utmost importance for students of the Way. Therefore, without begrudging the detail, I have recorded it for later students. Do not regard it as superfluous, like drawing legs on a snake.

These ten practices are to be applied in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. While dressing and eating, defecating and urinating, conversing and working—at all times and in all places—maintain continuous and seamless awareness and contemplation. There is no need to sit in meditation and investigate. If, however, one’s habitual obstacles are deep and one’s strength has not yet reached this point, one may still practice in seated meditation. But after leaving the cushion, one must extend the practice of meditative stability into circumstances and exert oneself in training amid activity. In this way, one may perhaps soon become continuous and undivided, attain the great accomplishment of effortlessness, and perfectly fulfill the great Way of bodhi.

As for Esoteric Buddhism, after awakening one must further cultivate it secretly, in the hope of attaining accomplishment in this very body. Its practices are extensive and its expedient means numerous, far beyond those of Exoteric Buddhism. Yet Esoteric Dharma places great value on transmission from a master and the conferral of empowerment, and it cannot be openly disclosed. Therefore, this account is brief.

Realizing the Essence and Activating Its Function

The ancients often did not speak in detail about the manifestations of realizing the essence. First, this realm of realization cannot be reached by words or thought; once it falls into verbal formulation, it risks becoming an object of attachment. Second, those who have truly realized it return to having nothing attained and do not wish to display it before others. Third, they fear that those not yet awakened may secretly

claim it as their own and thereby mislead others. Fourth, they fear that people may seek it by clinging to such states, thereby obstructing the gate of awakening.

Fifth, the states that individuals pass through are not entirely the same. For these and other reasons, they merely describe it in approximate terms: “clouds dispersing across the vast sky, revealing the clear blue heavens”; “a cloudless sky stretching ten thousand miles”; “the solitary full moon of mind, its light containing the myriad forms”; “neither bright nor dim, neither large nor small, neither blue nor yellow”; or simply, “perfectly round and radiant.”

I seem to be no exception. Moreover, there is nothing I have realized or attained, and nothing I can put into words. I can only gather a few ready-made koans to offer my readers. As for the details, readers must await their own diligent practice, realization, and understanding.

When we practice to the point that subject and object are both forgotten, and mind and phenomena both fall away, then, regardless of which school we practice, it suddenly breaks with a snap and bursts apart with a bang. It is like an explosive suddenly detonating: inwardly, body and mind; outwardly, the world; and even empty space—all at once fall away and are shattered into nothing. Even that nothingness becomes nothing.

This is what is meant by “the great earth sinks level and empty space is shattered.” At that time, although there is nothing at all, one is empty and luminous, utterly still; the numinous awareness is never obscured, and there is clear, ever-present knowing, unlike wood or stone. Although there is such clear knowing, there is no knower and nothing known, for this clear knowing in its entirety is one expanse of empty, luminous, numinous awareness. There can no longer be a knower or an object known. To posit further knowing is to put another head atop one’s head; that is no longer true knowing.

After realizing this true realm, we look back and recognize that this “numinous awareness” is nowhere else. All day long it shines forth at the gateways of the six sense faculties, without the slightest separation or interval from us. Every word, action, and movement is its wondrous and spiritual functioning.

Formerly, we endured great hardship and sought and explored it in every way. Yet it was right before us, and we did not recognize it. Instead, we defiled and humiliated it, revolving and suffering in the six realms. How unjustly we have suffered! The ancient worthies said: “The phrase before sound is not transmitted by a thousand sages; the thread before one’s face has never been interrupted throughout the ages.” They also said: “After wearing out iron shoes in searching, one finds it without any effort at all.” This is precisely what they meant.

Yet this is only the bare dharmakāya. It still requires diligent polishing and the continuous, careful removal of habitual tendencies before it can shine with great brilliance. When one's practice is fully mature, even in deep sleep the crown of the head is illuminated like a bright mid-autumn moon. When this luminosity becomes pure and refined, the vast heavenly eye naturally opens wide, and the worlds of the ten directions all appear at once. I enter them and they enter me, like Indra's net, interpenetrating layer upon layer, with inexhaustible wondrous functioning.

Some may say that such manifestations are realized by practitioners of the Chan school or Esoteric Buddhism. They may hold that those in the Pure Land school who practice Buddha-recitation should not experience this, since their aim is rebirth in the Western Pure Land. They should see Amitābha Buddha and the sacred realm of the West in samādhi; they should not see nothing at all. If they see nothing at all, how could they be reborn in the Pure Land?

The answer is: Have you not read the passage from Master Yinguang's Buddha-Recitation Samādhi quoted above? Master Yinguang strongly advocated relying on the compassionate power of the Buddha to guide one to rebirth in the West. Why, then, did he also say in that text that seeing without anything seen is true seeing, and that true seeing sees nothing? This is because suchness and Buddha-nature are formless and without characteristics, unstained by a single speck of dust and without a single thread; to speak of them as any one thing is already wrong.

Thus, of the true Buddha there is in fact nothing that can be said and no form that can be seen. Yet this formless Buddha-nature is not a dead emptiness; it can manifest appearances and function in accordance with conditions. But because such appearances arise in accordance with conditions, they are only provisional names, not real entities. Therefore, to see a Buddha with form is not to see the true Buddha. An ancient worthy said: "The sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya are not the true Buddha, nor are they the one who teaches the Dharma." The Lotus Sūtra calls them a phantom city, not the treasure land.

To attain the highest grade of the highest rebirth in the Western Pure Land, one must pass beyond the temporary resting place of form and realize the wondrous essence of the true Buddha, which is without form. Only then can one fulfill one's aspiration. Conversely, if one clings to a Buddha with form and a Pure Land with characteristics, one can attain only the lowest grade of the lowest rebirth. This is an unalterable truth.

Therefore, when Master Yinguang spoke of the highest state of Buddha-recitation—Buddha-recitation samādhi—he too had to say that seeing without anything seen is true seeing. Upon realizing such a profound state, mind and land become continuous and undivided: mind itself is the land, and the land itself is mind. To vow

to be reborn in the West is to be reborn in the Pure Land of one's own mind. Since there is birth with no place of birth, need one fear not attaining the highest grade of the highest rebirth?

After seeing one's true nature, if one stubbornly clings to a state of emptiness, or indulges in dwelling in quiet seclusion without knowing how to function amid circumstances, one is like a poor man who becomes wealthy but does not know how to use his wealth, and thus remains as poor as before. Moreover, without tempering oneself amid the circumstances of phenomena, one cannot attain the great samādhi in which principle and phenomena interpenetrate, much less reach the state of the nonobstruction among phenomena and perfect the great work of Buddhahood.

Therefore, one must temper the principle one has realized amid the circumstances of phenomena, smoothing away its sharp edges, before attaining complete perfection. Yet those newly awakened often do not know how to function, still less do they understand the process. Sometimes, because their strength is temporarily insufficient and they are stirred by events, they again doubt whether what they realized was correct and thereby shake their foundation. Bewildered and at a loss, they are truly to be pitied. I shall now select and excerpt the essential portions of my late teacher Xianglu's Process of Realizing the Essence and Bringing It into Function, in order to help readers bring prajñā into function after awakening and accomplish the supreme work of non-contrivance. How fortunate that would be!

The wondrous essence of true reality inherently possesses the wondrous functioning of non-abiding. Students must apply the pure, free state they have realized when human affairs become inverted and confused, transforming existence back into emptiness, inversion into purity, and afflictions into freedom. In this way, they not only eradicate their own suffering but may also eradicate the suffering of others. This is called liberating sentient beings.

The deeper one's practice, the more numerous and rapid the arising of habitual tendencies. Students need not be afraid. These are seeds naturally turning over and emerging from the field of ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna). Though their arising may be rapid, their disappearance is also very rapid. They may arise more forcefully than usual, but with each arising they become smaller, shorter, and fewer; they no longer continue to increase.

The deeper one's practice, the greater one's courage. If one is suddenly startled, one is startled only once and is not startled again; moreover, the more one applies one's strength, the stronger it becomes.

The deeper one's practice, the more one may suddenly become forgetful, yet one may also suddenly have a very strong memory, which grows ever more agile by the

day. One's powers of perception also become strong, and one often responds to things without deliberation. This is a preliminary sign of supernormal power.

Constantly contemplate this original nature and silently accord with it. Whenever habitual tendencies arise, immediately become aware of them; awareness itself transforms them into emptiness. Then use prajñā to sweep away this emptiness, and further use prajñā to sweep away the very sweeping-away. When there is nothing left to sweep away, one accords with the original nature and with the intent of prajñā's great emptiness.

In practice one must be accurate, resolute, reflective, patient, equanimous, and steady. To be accurate is to see the direction clearly, without doubt or retreat. To be resolute is to discipline oneself, showing not the least leniency; one must not excuse even the slightest fault in oneself. To be reflective is constantly to examine oneself. To be patient is to wait for the proper time. Without a sufficient period of time, one's strength cannot become adequate.

To be equanimous is to regard all things equally. Whatever one's attachments, they all arise because the mind lacks equanimity, discriminating gain and loss. One does not realize that dharmas are originally unborn—so why worry about gain? Dharmas are originally unceasing—so why worry about loss? When one can remain equanimous, one naturally does not startle, fear, or dread, but transcends all this and enters a state of freedom.

People often have conceptions of time, gain and loss, and success and failure. When various habitual tendencies arise, they cannot break through them. This means that samādhi is insufficient, wisdom is inadequate, and the power of prajñā is weak. Therefore one must be patient and wait until the proper time, when one's strength will naturally become sufficient. It is like walking a road: what matters is that the direction is right and one proceeds step by step, not whether one is fast or slow. To be steady is to remain stable in this way and never regress.

Realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is a matter of transcending the birth and death that have continued through immeasurable kalpas; how immensely important it is! One absolutely must not take mere intellectual understanding as sufficient. Understanding alone brings no meditative strength, and thus gives rise to wild wisdom and confusion; in the end, this cannot be called realizing the mind. There are seven stages. First, through extremely powerful wisdom, one sees the original nature and thereby gains a small measure of samādhi, as in those who enter through Chan.

Or one may, through strong meditative stability, awaken prajñā and see the original nature, as do those who enter through the practice of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. Second, after seeing it, one must have deep faith and no doubt; taking responsibility

for it is paramount. Third, one sees that intrinsic nature pervades the dharma realm, and thus everything in the dharma realm is none other than intrinsic nature. Call it illusory, and all is illusory; call it real, and all is real.

Upon investigation, both real and illusory are merely provisional names, not real entities. When the mind is not constrained by them, this is called non-abiding. Fourth, although all is non-abiding and empty, one does not fall into annihilationist emptiness; wondrous functioning remains clearly present. The illusory mind is not nonexistent; this is called the unborn. Fifth, though this is called non-abiding, one is not unaware of or undiscerning regarding good and evil; one discriminates without abiding, entering the realm of equality and nonduality.

Sixth, once the mind is equal, it naturally has no attachments, fear, or dread, and is free everywhere. Seventh, one's strength repeatedly advances and retreats, at times samādhi and at times wisdom; later, samādhi and wisdom are no longer separate, and one only advances without retreating. This is the true realization of the mind, in which principle and phenomena interpenetrate.

After realizing the mind, the view of self cannot be removed at once, nor can habitual tendencies be immediately purified. When views of self and habitual tendencies arise from moment to moment, and one can transform them from moment to moment, one is a person who has truly realized the mind. If one's power of transformation is weak, that is another matter. What is to be feared is not knowing how to transform; then one cannot transform. Therefore, in learning Buddhism, first one must awaken awareness, as if acquiring wealth; second, one must make good use of that awareness, as if using wealth; third, one must empty even awareness itself; fourth, there is no question of emptiness or non-emptiness—it is originally thus. A truly wealthy and honored person naturally forgets that they possess much wealth.

Once awareness and contemplation arise, habitual tendencies immediately dissolve. Yet the speed of this differs from person to person. There are ten stages in the process: first, circumstances arise and one is unaware. Second, circumstances arise and one later becomes aware, but arousing awareness is very laborious. Third, when circumstances arise, arousing awareness is not difficult. Fourth, when circumstances arise, awareness immediately arises, though there is a slight sequence between them. Fifth, circumstances and awareness arise simultaneously, but one sometimes forgets. Sixth, they arise together and one can remain without forgetting.

Seventh, awareness precedes circumstances, though it sometimes comes afterward, or one may occasionally even return to a state of forgetting. Eighth, awareness remains constant and unmoving. Ninth, awareness is not yet fully purified. Tenth,

one is constantly quiescent and constantly illumining, and even awareness is non-abiding. This is when one's strength is truly sufficient.

From ancient times, great habitual tendencies have been easy to remove, while minor habitual tendencies have been difficult to eliminate; this is still a lack of equanimity. Thus there remain the consequences of startlement, fear, and dread. During this process, one may rise and fall repeatedly; this must not be called regression.

Regularly use the method of inward reflection to examine your own habitual tendencies. Whether good or bad, wholesome or unwholesome, whatever is not easily dissolved and removed is a root of birth and death. Never stubbornly preserve it merely because it seems good. The harder it is to dissolve and remove, the more one must do so. Constantly going against oneself is progress in practice.

Removing habitual tendencies is like an inner struggle between personal desire and higher principle: only after a hundred battles can victory be won. It is never the work of a day or a night. Only after realizing the mind does one possess the qualifications to engage in this battle. This is the arising of function: from small battles to great ones, from small victories to great victories, until the enemy at its root is defeated and there will be no further trouble.

In practice, one must by no means suppress or evade anything. The roots of greed and anger, for example, must be uprooted and dissolved. If one merely holds to precepts, samādhi, and wisdom in order to counter greed, anger, and ignorance, the dual view of good and evil will leave its trace in the mind. It is like defending a city when the enemy attacks: although the enemy cannot enter for the moment, it has not departed and may still seize an opportunity to enter the city. This is not ultimate. Therefore, do not suppress or evade; it is best to break through them, leaving no traces of either side. When the mind is unstained and both enemy and self are dissolved, one enters great samādhi.

When circumstances arise, do not attend to them and do not give rise to thoughts, yet do not fall into annihilation; this is samādhi in stillness. When confronting circumstances, remain undeluded and respond as usual; active yet unmoved, this is samādhi in activity. When one is equally at ease in stillness and activity, with no fixed insistence on accepting or rejecting, that is great samādhi.

To train the mind, one must train one's responsiveness; this lies in thoroughly understanding the principle of cause and effect. Constantly arouse contemplation, and when practice is fully mature, great responsiveness and great function will arise. All afflictions arise from emotional attachment and views. Emotional attachment is self-love, while views are attachment to self. When attachment and views are firmly entrenched, they become obscurations, and the capacity to discern causes and

comprehend effects ceases to function keenly. This is why this function does not arise.

Those who attain the power of knowing others' minds depend entirely on the swift and keen capacity to discern causes and comprehend effects. Thus, principle and phenomena are thoroughly integrated; without waiting for thought, everything is seen with perfect clarity. It all depends on samādhi and wisdom supporting each other, and on practice becoming fully mature. This is spiritual power; there is no particular marvel to seek.

If one is willing to do what one disdains doing, willing to say what one does not wish to say, and willing to receive people with whom one does not wish to associate, one is not far from the light of equalizing wisdom. To see only others' faults not only makes it difficult to enter nonduality, but also obstructs one's own noble path and gives rise to arrogance. This is what practitioners must avoid most.

When one applies oneself to practice with intense earnestness, there will inevitably be a period when one is insensitive to worldly conventions and human feelings; hence the saying, "as though bereaved of one's parents." At the height of such earnestness, one will inevitably fall short in etiquette and deportment. Others often fail to understand, calling one arrogant and self-important, or suspecting one of madness. Everyone must pass through this stage, and it is difficult to explain.

When diligence in practice suddenly alternates with laziness, seeming now to advance and now to retreat, do not become doubtful or apprehensive. This is a time of progress in practice. Do not be impatient or disheartened.

To enjoy quiet and dislike disturbance is itself a lack of equanimity, and it must never be so. Know that quiet and disturbance are distinctions made by one's own mind; they have nothing to do with circumstances.

For a practitioner to praise oneself and disparage others, to suppress others and exalt oneself, is most shameful and ridiculous. Be careful not to invite the ridicule of those with understanding.

Do not make vows lightly, for making vows is easy while fulfilling them is difficult. One's vows should be great and firm, and not a trace of emotional attachment or views may be mixed into one's own mind.

Among the eight worldly winds, four are easy to guard against and four are difficult to defend against. Adverse circumstances are easily recognized, but favorable ones often draw us into their snare without our knowing it. Therefore, in matters that go as one wishes, one must be especially vigilant and guard against being swept up in circumstances.

There is nothing strange or extraordinary here: simply remove habitual tendencies, and do not construe this as attainment of sagehood. So-called mysterious marvels and transformations are also ordinary enough; because they are seldom seen, people regard them as strange and mysterious. They forget the original nature, enter a demonic path, and how regrettable that is!

In practice, never compare your strengths and weaknesses with those of others. Instead, observe silently and reflect upon yourself.

Methods of practice are expedient means for a time; never become attached to dharmas. Craving dharmas is equivalent to craving fame and profit; both belong to birth and death. So-called becoming a Buddha means realizing emptiness of nature as the Buddha does. Once the mind has an attachment, it immediately loses its original nature and departs from the realm of Buddhahood. Therefore, one should remain constantly vigilant and aware.

The removal of habitual tendencies also depends on causes and conditions, and thus may be rapid or slow. After realizing the mind, safeguard realization continuously and seamlessly—so-called safeguarding realization does not mean suppressing the mind so that no thoughts arise, but simply being able to transform without abiding. After a considerable time, habitual tendencies may wonderfully disappear all at once.

The myriad sufferings and troubles of sentient beings arise solely from confusion. Confusion arises through inferential cognition. For one who has seen one's true nature, seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing are clear and ever-present. When no thoughts arise, the mind's encounter with circumstances is direct perception. When discriminating thoughts arise, one is active yet unmoved; though there is inferential cognition, there is also direct perception. To be constantly thus is called becoming continuous and undivided.

The extent of one's power of skillful means varies with the power of wisdom, and the extent of wisdom depends on whether contemplation is complete. When it is complete, there is penetration; when there is penetration, it is complete. What is meant by penetration is that the mind is unobstructed. Obstruction means that the mind obstructs itself. When the mind is bright, whole, and free from delusion, there is penetration. This is called unobstructed wisdom, arising from the dhāraṇī of the great compassionate mind. Dhāraṇī is the mind's most empty and most profound ground.

The method of training the mind lies simply in enduring what is difficult amid obstructions. Take all habits as an example: inherently, none imposes a fixed rule, and none is indispensable. The trouble is that we cultivate habits ourselves, believing that things cannot be otherwise, and consequently cannot bear to go

against ourselves. This is how obstruction is established. If one can endure it, there is no obstruction, for originally there is no obstruction.

Take matters of face and reputation: they are inherently illusory and unreal. At worst, one merely loses face, which is itself illusory. See whether it truly obstructs you or not. This discomfort is only temporary; once you overcome it, could the unobstructed power of wisdom that you gain be bought even with ten thousand pieces of gold? Therefore, studying Buddhism is the work of a true person of great resolve: one must be able to endure and to let go, neither drifting along with worldly customs nor opposing them. This is what is meant by harmony without conformity; then one rises above them and enters the sacred.

The scenes that appear in dreams can be used to assess the depth or shallowness of one's practice. Whenever practice becomes most intimate and earnest, the mind responds in dreams. If one can retain self-mastery in a dream, this is evidence that one will not enter the three lower realms. Those who enter the three lower realms do so because the mind has lost its mastery: one has the force of being carried along, but not the power of self-mastery, and follows the higher or lower course of karma into them without awareness. If one has one part of such strength in a dream, one must have ten parts of strength while awake. In dreams, mind and body are half separated; in death, they are wholly separated. Death is not greatly different from dreaming.

Because all wondrous functioning does not depart from awareness of worldly affairs, after realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, one must attend carefully to human feelings and worldly affairs everywhere, training oneself to understand and respond to them fully, and using them to remove habitual tendencies in mutual fashion. Only when one is thoroughly familiar with the principle of cause and effect can one anticipate circumstances and bring forth great responsiveness and great function.

The Commentary on the Chapter "Abiding Mind" of the Mahāvairocana Sūtra says: "When bodhisattvas first illuminate the Way, they immediately attain the samādhi of removing obscurations and abide together with Buddhas and bodhisattvas. They develop the five supernormal powers, attain the dhāraṇī for knowing the languages of all sentient beings, are able to know the mental activities of all sentient beings, perform the works of the Buddhas, and liberate them extensively," and so forth. To illuminate the Way is to see one's true nature and become a Buddha; to remove obscurations is to remove habitual tendencies.

Whenever habitual tendencies are purified, the five supernormal powers unfold; they cannot be sought in advance. After attaining spiritual powers, one uses the power of knowing others' minds as an expedient to liberate sentient beings. This is

the process by which function arises from realized essence. Those who enter by a path other than this are following a non-Buddhist path.

After illuminating the Way, although the five supernormal powers may not all manifest at once, one is no longer like an ordinary person. Having realized the root, the removal of obscurations and the development of supernormal powers begin simultaneously; only their strength is still slight.

After awakening, one is still the same as before awakening. Until one reaches plainness and ordinariness, the fire of practice cannot attain complete maturity. So-called great wisdom appears foolish: one may seem dazed and foolish all day long, having become continuous and undivided.

The passages recorded above are truly a bridge for bringing forth the wondrous function of prajñā after realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. If students can indeed enter this teaching with faith and without doubt, then after realizing the essence, maintain vigilant awareness at every moment, temper themselves in human feelings and worldly affairs, deeply understand the mental activities of sentient beings, and become familiar with the principle of cause and effect, they will remove obscurations, develop the five supernormal powers, and bring forth great responsiveness and great function.

The Question of Ultimate Destination

Some have asked where those who have realized the mind and seen their true nature go after passing away. Others have asked: when the Sixth Patriarch was about to pass away, he said, "I myself know where I am going," yet did not state where that was. Did he know but not say, or did he not know where he was going and therefore not say?

Where one goes upon death and rebirth is indeed a crucial question for practitioners. If it is not clearly understood, it will greatly hinder the progress of practice and lead to detours in one's future realization of fruition.

Generally speaking, the multitude of sentient beings bob up and down in the six realms, ceaselessly revolving in saṃsāra, born and dying without knowing why. Now that one has awakened, recognized one's own original mind, and seen one's own true nature, one should understand where birth comes from and where death returns. If one remains muddleheaded and does not know, is this not arrogant self-deception—mistaking nonawakening for awakening?

Yet such talk of birth and death, coming and going, is spoken in relation to deluded people who cling to appearances. For one who has awakened, who has opened the

true eye and thoroughly seen the true mind, the three realms and six realms are all not truly existent, and the Pure Lands of the ten directions are like the moon reflected in water. Since there is originally no birth, how can there be cessation? Since there is originally no cessation, why should there be birth? Once arising and ceasing are absent, how can there be coming and going? And how could there be any fixed location?

After realizing the Way, the Sixth Patriarch said: "Who would have expected that self-nature is originally pure? Who would have expected that self-nature is originally neither arising nor ceasing? Who would have expected that self-nature is originally complete in itself? Who would have expected that self-nature is originally unmoving? Who would have expected that self-nature can give rise to all phenomena?"

What is meant by realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is precisely seeing this true nature that is unmoving, neither coming nor going, neither arising nor ceasing, yet able to manifest appearances in accordance with conditions and give rise to all manner of wondrous functioning—the true nature that is true emptiness yet wondrous presence. Having clearly seen that one's true nature neither arises nor ceases, neither comes nor goes, why then grasp at the appearances of coming and going, arising and ceasing, and posit somewhere to which one returns? Thus, if one takes death and rebirth to be ultimately real, one has not truly awakened and seen one's true nature.

When the Sixth Patriarch said, "I myself know where I am going," he was holding up a yellow leaf to stop a child's crying. He did not explicitly state the destination because there is in fact no destination. This nature is like empty space; where could empty space return? If one sees a destination, one reifies it and clings to appearances. To reify and cling to appearances is not to be free of birth and death. Having no destination, one may go everywhere; one may go everywhere without ever having gone. What is called returning is nonreturning, and nonreturning is returning; everywhere is a return, and every place is a return.

Furthermore, wondrous presence is true emptiness because it is wondrous presence; otherwise, it would be inert emptiness. True emptiness is wondrous presence because it is true emptiness; otherwise, it would become delusive existence. Therefore, those who thoroughly awaken to mind and intrinsic nature integrate form and emptiness and unite essence and function. They neither incline toward emptiness nor cling to existence. Where there is no arising or ceasing, they may nonetheless manifest arising and ceasing: though birth is manifested, there is ultimately no birth; though birthless, it excludes no manifestation of birth.

Thus, there is nowhere—in heaven or on earth, among the four modes of birth and the six realms, or even in the Pure Lands of the ten directions—where one cannot

be born. Where there is no coming or going, one may nonetheless bob up and down; though manifesting bodies everywhere, there is in truth no coming or going. Without coming or going, one nevertheless ordinarily comes and goes. This is not the dead stillness of sitting behind a dark mountain and calling that freedom from arising, ceasing, coming, and going.

Layman Pang's "Hymn of the Unborn" says: "There is a son who does not marry, and a daughter who does not wed; the whole family gathers round to speak of the unborn."

A Chan master responded in verse: "There is no son to marry, no daughter to wed; the assembly gathers round—what talk is there of the unborn?"

I tried a responding verse: "If there is a son, he marries; if there is a daughter, she weds. Children and grandchildren, generation after generation—this is talk of the unborn."

Taken together, these three verses precisely reveal the nature of true emptiness and wondrous presence: unborn yet not excluding birth, nowhere present yet nowhere absent.

Those who truly see their nature are at ease in accordance with conditions and do not cling to appearances in the slightest. They make no distinction between purity and defilement, ordinary beings and sages, or between the four modes of birth and the six realms. What are called arising and ceasing, coming and going, are all the free play of samādhi; they are not reified as real. If this is truly so, what need is there to specify an actual destination?

For example, a monk asked Changsha, "Where did Nanquan go after passing away?" Changsha replied, "In the eastern household he becomes a donkey; in the western household he becomes a horse!" Another monk asked, "Where did Nanquan go after passing away?" Changsha replied, "Ride when you wish to ride; dismount when you wish to dismount." Yet another monk asked, "Where did Nanquan go after passing away?" Changsha again said, "When Shitou was a novice, he went to see the Sixth Patriarch."

When asked again, he said, "Let him go and ponder it." Later, when asked three more times, Changsha remained silent on all three occasions. This praises the wondrous nature of suchness: so elusive and unfathomable, beyond conception, impossible to grasp anywhere! After hearing this, Sansheng, a Dharma heir of Chan Master Linji, said: "Changsha's replies may be called unprecedented and unsurpassed, rarely heard in any age!" From this we can see that the wondrous nature of spiritual knowing is everywhere. We need only let go of everything, abide

nowhere at all, and cease seeking a place in which to be; then we are everywhere, and wherever we dwell, we are always at ease.

However, if those who have awakened to their own nature still have deep-rooted habitual tendencies and, in their daily functioning, cannot remain unconfined by favorable or adverse circumstances and unstained by sounds and forms, then their segmented birth and death is not yet ended. They cannot yet be as carefree and at ease as described above, but must still return to the human and deva realms seven times, or three times, before attaining freedom. Chan Master Guifeng, according to the depth of one's practice, distinguished three kinds of freedom in order to urge students to apply themselves diligently.

First, whenever deluded thoughts arise, one does not follow them. At the time of death, karma naturally cannot bind one; even if there is an intermediate state, one is free to go where one wishes and may dwell at will in heaven or among humans. This is mastery over taking rebirth. Second, when thoughts of love and aversion have already vanished, one no longer receives a segmented body and can naturally transform the short into the long and the coarse into the sublime. This is mastery of transformation. Third, when the subtle continuous stream has entirely ceased, and only the great wisdom of perfect enlightenment remains brilliantly present, one can manifest countless transformation bodies in response to circumstances and liberate sentient beings with whom one has affinities. This is called Buddhahood. This is ultimate freedom.

Fellow practitioners, after awakening to our original nature, we should guard and sustain it rigorously, strive to advance, and diligently and unremittingly eliminate the stream of consciousness driven by present karma, so as to attain ultimate freedom and realize the supreme fruition. We must never be satisfied with a little attainment, stagnate, and drift downward. Should our strength fail to match our aspirations and conditions not come together, we should at least strive to attain mastery of transformation.

If one cannot even accomplish this, one can only make vows for rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, the Inner Court of Tuṣita, or another Buddha-land and Pure Land, in the hope of being liberated from the two forms of birth-and-death —segmented and transformational and realizing true permanence. Since the Ming dynasty, many Chan masters, such as Master Lianchi and Chewu, made vows after awakening to be reborn in the Western Pure Land. Perhaps this was because they could not attain mastery of transformation and thus had no choice but to vow for rebirth in the Pure Land.

If practitioners of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma fear that they may not attain complete accomplishment in this life, then in addition to their practice they should recite

Maitreya Bodhisattva's root mantra forty-nine times each day, thereby laying a foundation for future rebirth in Tuṣita and ensuring progress without regression. What painstaking care they take!

Of course, great-resolve ordinary beings, for the sake of liberating sentient beings, do not fear birth and death. To them, falling into the three lower realms is like falling into the four noble realms, without the slightest dismay. Such are truly great persons of lofty resolve, admired by humans and devas alike and praised and protected by Buddhas and bodhisattvas; they do not fall within this category.

Conclusion

The foregoing has gone on at length about the significance of realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, and the means of attaining it. It has also introduced expedient means for true cultivation after awakening, restated the process of realizing the essence and giving rise to its function, and excerpted writings by eminent masters, ancient and modern. It may seem that the dharma gates of realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation, and accomplishment within a single lifetime have been explained in exhaustive detail.

Yet, to speak plainly and thoroughly, all this is needless words that merely encumber sentient beings—hardly worth mentioning, an entirely superfluous undertaking. For all sentient beings are originally Buddhas: there is no need for practice or realization. Their wondrous functioning is inherently boundless, and their spiritual powers unobstructed. Simply let things take their course in dressing and eating, responding to conditions and engaging with things, without grasping or rejecting, attachment or seeking; then one is the Buddha of suchness.

Patriarch Linji said: "The solitary luminosity, without form or aspect, that is clearly present before you—that is a living Buddha and a living patriarch." (That is, before one there is something without form or characteristics, lucid as empty space, clearly present without interruption: an absolute, nondual empty luminosity.) He also said: "The pure light of mind in a single thought is the dharmakāya Buddha; the non-discriminating light of mind in a single thought is the sambhogakāya Buddha; the non-differentiating light of mind in a single thought is the nirmāṇakāya Buddha." He further said: "My understanding is no different from Śākyamuni's. In our manifold daily functions, what is lacking? The spiritual radiance functioning through the six sense faculties never ceases—if this is not Buddha, what is it?"

If we can truly face all circumstances without turning toward or away from them, without grasping or rejecting, responding with ease and acting freely whether yielding or taking, then joking, laughing, showing anger, and scolding are all

wondrous functions of spiritual powers; walking, standing, sitting, and lying down are all the radiance of the ocean-seal.

Here, shen ( ) refers to the wondrous functioning of the true mind: all one does is the functioning of its spiritual radiance. Every appearance arises through it, and every undertaking is accomplished by it. Here, tong ( ) means unobstructed and unhindered functioning, free of blockage or impediment; it means having neither aversion nor attachment, joy nor sorrow, amid circumstances and objects. If this is so, body and mind are light and at ease, freed from worldly encumbrances. Neither mind nor Buddha—when hungry, eat; when tired, sleep. What need is there for any further practice?

But sentient beings lack penetrating insight. If they are not chasing after sights and pursuing things, grasping at appearances and seeking them, then they are beset by layer upon layer of deluded thoughts and deeply entrenched emotional views. Thus they burden all Buddhas with blame, causing them to appear in the world and chatter on endlessly, speaking at length. They mix with mud and water, lowering themselves into the weeds, only for Yunmen to threaten to strike them dead with a staff and feed them to dogs, all for the sake of peace under heaven.

Yet the Buddhas' compassionate hearts are deeply earnest. Unafraid of bearing blame and undaunted by being beaten to death, they still come forth in great numbers, giving their heads, eyes, bones, and marrow for sentient beings. Where there was originally no opening for speech, they provisionally expounded the twelvefold teaching; where there was originally no point from which to begin, they established eighty-four thousand dharma gates. They sought only to awaken us from our deluded dream, so that we might return home by the road before us and recover our Original Face. What painstaking care they take!

If, after this detailed explanation, we still cannot grasp it firmly and do not dare affirm that "one's own mind is Buddha"; or if we do not understand that dressing and eating are themselves wondrous functions of spiritual powers, but instead seek something miraculous and mysterious elsewhere, then not only must we diligently practice Buddha-recitation and investigate Chan, but we must also earnestly cultivate Esoteric Buddhism, so as to open wisdom through samādhi, awaken in accord with our original nature, and then proceed to safeguard realization and remove habitual tendencies. Only then can we sit securely at home and be liberated from birth and death. We must never blindly boast of no practice, no attainment, and no realization, thereby ruining an entire lifetime and bringing harm in future lives. Nor should we shrink from difficulty and fail to advance, thus losing this precious opportunity.

What are called spiritual powers and transformations are in fact quite ordinary. They are wondrous functions inherently possessed by our intrinsic nature, not something that comes from outside. They ordinarily do not manifest because they are obscured by deluded thoughts; once delusion is exhausted, they manifest. Because they are seldom seen, people regard them as strange and think them unfathomably miraculous. In truth, everyone inherently possesses them, and everyone can exercise them. It is like dressing and eating: everyone can do it. What is so extraordinary about it? The ancient masters said that to fall into

the three lower realms is precisely to fall into the four holy realms; throughout the ten dharma realms, spiritual powers and transformations are all alike. What is there to prize? What is there to find strange? Moreover, once one becomes preoccupied with strange and bizarre things, one enters the path of demons. This is something that requires caution.

As for cultivating no-thought, one must never suppress thoughts so that they do not arise. Rather, when thoughts arise, do not follow them or cling to conditions, and do not abide in appearances. Human beings are not wood or stone; how could they be without thoughts? To become a Buddha is to possess great capacity and great function, to be an awakened one who is lively and responsive—how could such a one fail to give rise to thoughts? Therefore, the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment teaches us: “At all times, do not give rise to deluded thoughts; yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it.”

The Diamond Sūtra says: “Give rise to the mind without abiding anywhere!” The Sixth Patriarch’s verse correcting Wolun’s verse on extinguishing the mind likewise says: “Huineng has no special skills; he does not cut off the hundred thoughts.

When encountering objects, thoughts repeatedly arise; how could bodhi grow?” Therefore, we need only keep the mind empty at all times, grasping and rejecting nothing in any matter and stirring no emotional thoughts. We may fully respond to conditions and engage with things, yet see no mind arising to respond; once a matter is complete, not even a trace of deliberate mental activity remains. Thus, though active throughout the day, we have never moved; though thoughts arise all day long, not a single thought has arisen. Chan Master Niutou Farong, also known as Lanrong, says in his “Ode to No-Mind”: “Just when mind is employed, no mind is employed; / No-mind functions at that very moment; / Though constantly employed, it is ever just no mind.” This is indeed the finest portrayal of no-mind.

Furthermore, cultivating no-thought does not mean regarding progress as gradually extending the interval of true emptiness and no-thought between the cessation of the preceding thought and the arising of the next. For example, one might have no thoughts for only one minute today, gradually extending this to five minutes, ten

minutes, then one hour or twenty-four hours, and take that as success. You must understand that no-thought is lively and vibrant; it is not rigid and inert like a block of wood or stone.

A monk asked Zhaozhou, “What is no-thought?” Zhaozhou said, “Hitting a ball on swift water!” A later master commented, “Thought after thought does not linger!” What is called no-thought does not mean that not a single thought arises. Rather, thoughts cease as they arise, leaving not the slightest trace of abiding in appearances. Therefore, as explained above, when thoughts are arising in response to conditions, one does not see thoughts arising; since there is no arising, how could there be cessation? Since there is no arising or ceasing, it is called no-thought. When one is not responding to conditions or engaging with things, although not a single thought arises, one is only as precarious as treading on a tiger’s tail or on spring ice: when conditions are encountered, thoughts arise at once. It is not the dead stillness and unconsciousness of wood or stone.

Someone may ask: “After such a detailed explanation today, I deeply believe that the empty, quiescent spiritual knowing present when not a single thought arises is our true nature. But why am I still unable to penetrate and break free from each and every Chan koan?”

The answer is: Chan koans are not especially extraordinary. They merely test whether students can avoid being deceived or carried away by circumstances; whether they can refrain from establishing views or being trapped by words and phrases; and whether they can avoid falling into annihilationism while responding and functioning with ease.

Once students recognize the root, they need only safeguard realization continuously and seamlessly. Prajñā will naturally unfold day by day, and the light of wisdom will naturally grow ever more complete. They need not worry that they will fail to understand such sayings.

As the saying goes: “Once you have the root, do not worry about the branches; fear only that you will not become a Buddha, not that a Buddha will not understand speech!” The expressions of the Chan school are not deliberately made strange or used to play at mystery. They are simply employed to test the sharpness or dullness of students’ capacities and to observe the strength of their ordinary realization and care for their original nature.

Therefore, if we train deeply in ordinary life, with minds like vast empty space, and do not fall for the traps of circumstances, remaining empty and non-abiding at all times and in all places, then our responses will naturally be quick and keen. Whatever sayings or koans come before our eyes, we will immediately know where they lead.

For example, Chan Master Weishan Lingyou instructed the assembly: “After this old monk has lived out his hundred years, he will be reborn as a water buffalo in the household of a donor below the mountain. On its right flank will be written, ‘The monk So-and-so of Weishan.’ If you call me the monk of Weishan, it is a water buffalo; if you call me a water buffalo, it is again the monk of Weishan. What should you call me?” This exchanges the two names, water buffalo and monk of Weishan, to test your insight and see whether you will be deceived.

If your mind is not empty and pure, and you work within names and appearances, you will certainly be deceived by his “buffalo” and “monk.” If you establish views upon names and appearances, then you have fallen for the trap of his circumstance. Therefore, you must use the method of casting off: only by responding apart from “buffalo” and “monk” is there a way out.

For what is called monk and what is called buffalo are no more than provisional false appearances and false names. From the standpoint of true nature, where are buffalo and monk? Therefore, look from the standpoint of truth: establish not a single thing, and you will break through the encirclement. At that time no one in Weishan’s assembly answered, but later an elder master gave an excellent reply.

He said: “The Master has no other name.” Though he did not speak of names, he did not depart from names. He said that originally there are no names, yet names may be freely given; he neither clung to monk and buffalo nor departed from monk and buffalo. Having broken through names and appearances, he revealed suchness; yet suchness does not exist apart from these names and appearances.

This is indeed a marvelous double entendre. But now we need not let the ancients alone excel before us; we too may offer another saying in response to them. Since the wondrous functioning of intrinsic nature is boundless, we may take it up horizontally or wield it vertically, portray it as we please, and need not confine ourselves to any one pattern. The preceding answer spoke from the essence; let us now answer from the function instead: “Idle names have always filled the Five Lakes!” Do you all understand? Tell me: is this the same as the preceding saying, or different?

Again, Chan Master Gaofeng asked his students: “Why does a great cultivator not observe the Vinaya?” This too tested whether they were constrained by names and appearances. Likewise, one need only answer by the method of casting off: “Because he does not know good from bad!” Since Buddha-nature is pure and unstained, utterly bare, without good or evil, what precepts or non-precepts, wisdom or non-wisdom could there be? To speak of precepts, samādhi, and wisdom is like digging sores into healthy flesh, vainly causing oneself hardship!

Furthermore, even if one is verbally fluent and gives profound replies, one must still be examined carefully before it can be known whether one has truly awakened. Some Chan practitioners read several koans in books, or hear a few turning phrases from others, secretly appropriate them as their own, and play with their tongues and lips. If they happen to produce a fitting reply, they take themselves to have awakened. That is a very grave mistake!

For example, Chan Master Xuefeng Yicun addressed the assembly: “To speak of this matter, it is like an ancient mirror: when a Hu person comes, a Hu person appears; when a Han person comes, a Han person appears.” Xuansha came forth and asked, “What if the mirror itself comes?” The master said, “Hu and Han both disappear!” Xuansha said, “The monk’s heels do not touch the ground!” He did not approve of Xuefeng.

Recently, a Chan practitioner said, “Why not answer him: ‘Break the mirror, and then meet face to face!’” This too is a fine saying. But one must examine whether he has genuine insight. I then asked, “Once the mirror is broken, how do you meet face to face?” He was immediately at a loss for words and could give no answer. This shows that such fitting replies did not arise from his own realization, but were acquired externally through hearsay. As Chan Master Guizong said, “Toad Chan can make only one jump.” An ancient master said: “One fitting phrase becomes a tethering stake for a donkey through ten thousand ages!” Is this not something to fear?

For example, Chan Master Miyun Wu of Tiantong Monastery once instructed an attendant, at the winter solstice, to deliver cotton-padded garments to the elderly monks living in hermitages, so that they might ward off the cold. One old monk said to the attendant, “This old monk has his own robe, given him by his mother at birth; he has no need of winter clothing.” The attendant reported this to Miyun Wu. Wu said, “This monk seems to have some awakening, but I fear it is not genuine. Probe him further through his words.”

He therefore told the attendant to go back and ask, “What garment did you wear before your mother gave birth to you?” The old monk could not answer. Wu instructed him to investigate this saying. Three years later, the monk passed away, without having given an answer. At his cremation, innumerable relics were found, and the whole assembly marveled. Wu said, “Ten hu of relics cannot equal a single turning word. Try answering for him.” None of them could speak.

This koan shows that a merely similar-sounding phrase is not true awakening, and that relics found after cremation are likewise not proof of realization of the Way. One must truly recognize one’s own original mind and see one’s own intrinsic nature. Then, like a gourd on water, it turns at the slightest touch—perfectly integrated and without obstruction, lively and free. To repay my readers, I shall now

resolve this koan. Though I may make a fool of myself before everyone, I will offer an answer in his place: when asked, “What garment did you wear before your mother gave birth to you?” simply say, “The tender peach and plum have scarcely faded, and fresh chrysanthemums and plum blossoms appear anew!” This also spares Chan Master Wu the trouble of testing the water in vain.

We must not force ourselves into the role of those who understand. Having gained only a partial understanding through conceptual reasoning, we should not complacently rejoice and suppose that we have realized the Way. We must practice earnestly in the most subtle and hidden reaches.

Even if for a time you do not understand these koans, it is of no great consequence. You need only recognize the original nature with certainty and protect it strictly. As it is said, “Mind after mind does not differ; thought after thought is without disparity.” Diligently eliminate deluded habits and transform yourself. Within three to five years, you will surely find that “the skin has completely fallen away, leaving only one reality exposed!” You will surely penetrate these old masters’ words through and through; whether you take them up horizontally or wield them vertically, all will become wondrous truths.

These words, together with all spiritual powers and wondrous functions, are nothing but idle furnishings within one’s own mind of intrinsic nature. What is there about them that is extraordinary or worth relying upon? Moreover, one who has truly reached the ultimate returns with nothing attained.

As it is said, there are no Buddhas and no sentient beings, no realization and no attainment. If there is even the slightest mystery or miracle, one is attached to objects. Not only will one be unable to become a Buddha; one may instead fall prey to demonic influence. Regrettably, some well-known people today are also attached to spiritual powers and their functions, and their minds are not tranquil and pure. When commenting on figures of past and present, they either say that someone possessed great spiritual powers or that someone was incapable, without pointing out where these people cling and attach. Thus later students are not shown how to advance and are given no encouragement. This precisely reveals that they still have something they value and have fallen into old molds. How can one speak of this without deep lamentation?

To help later students distinguish true mind from deluded mind, know how to apply themselves vigorously, and avoid mistakenly entering deviant paths, I will again excerpt below the section on distinguishing true from deluded in Chan Master Zhina’s Direct Explanation of the True Mind:

“Someone asked: When true mind and deluded mind encounter objects, how are they to be distinguished? The reply: When encountering objects, deluded mind

knows through discriminating cognition. In favorable or adverse circumstances, it gives rise to minds of greed and anger; in neutral circumstances, it gives rise to a mind of ignorance. Since greed, anger, and ignorance—the three poisons—arise in response to objects, it is clearly deluded mind. True mind, however, is without knowing yet knows. Because it embraces all with impartial awareness, it differs from plants and trees; because it gives rise to neither hatred nor love, it differs from deluded mind.

When encountering objects, it is empty and luminous, neither hating nor loving; that which is without knowing yet knows is true mind. Therefore, the Treatise of Sengzhao says: 'The mind of a sage is subtle, wondrous, and without characteristics; it cannot be said to exist. Its functioning is ever more diligent; it cannot be said not to exist. Since it is not existent, it knows yet is without knowing; since it is not nonexistent, it is without knowing yet knows. Thus, without knowing is itself knowing; nothing can be said to distinguish it from the mind of a sage.'

Furthermore, deluded mind is attached to existence when there is existence and attached to nonexistence when there is nonexistence. It constantly abides in the two extremes and does not know the Middle Way. Yongjia said: 'Abandoning deluded mind and grasping true principle—the mind of grasping and rejecting becomes contrived falsity. If practitioners do not understand how to apply cultivation, they truly take a thief for their own son.' True mind, however, dwells amid existence and nonexistence without falling into either; it constantly abides in the Middle Way.

Therefore the patriarch said, 'Do not pursue conditioned circumstances; do not abide in an experience of emptiness. With one impartial mind, all fades away of itself.' The Treatise of Sengzhao says: 'Thus sages dwell in existence without being existent, and abide in nonexistence without being nonexistent. Although they do not grasp existence or nonexistence, neither do they abandon existence or nonexistence. Therefore, blending their light with the dust, they move freely through the five destinies; silently they go, quietly they come; serene and without contrivance, yet there is nothing they do not do.'

True mind is ordinary mind, whereas deluded mind is not ordinary mind. Someone asked: What is called ordinary mind? The reply: Everyone possesses a point of spiritual luminosity, clear and still like empty space, pervading every place. In relation to worldly affairs, it is provisionally called principle and intrinsic nature; in relation to deluded consciousness, it is provisionally called true mind. It has not the slightest discrimination, yet is not confused when matters arise; it has not a single thought of grasping or rejecting, yet responds comprehensively to all things.

It does not shift with the myriad circumstances. Even if it accords with the stream and attains wondrousness, it never departs from the lucid stillness of the present

place. Seek it and you will know it—do you not see? This is true mind. Someone asked: What is called not ordinary mind? The reply: Circumstances may be ordinary or sacred, defiled or pure, annihilationist or eternalist, arising or ceasing, moving or still, coming or going, good or ugly, beautiful or evil, and so forth, extending to ten thousand distinctions and a thousand differences. All these are called nonordinary circumstances. When the mind arises and ceases in accordance with these nonordinary circumstances, in contrast to the preceding ordinary true mind, it is called nonordinary deluded mind. Someone asked: Does ordinary true mind not arise? The reply: True mind at times exercises its function; it does not arise by following circumstances. It simply sports in wondrous functioning and is not deluded about cause and effect!"

Students are urged to reflect on this with the utmost care!

Finally, I wish to offer students a word of sincere advice. After recognizing true mind and realizing the original nature, we must still practice all wholesome deeds. First, this tempers our habitual tendencies and increases the light of wisdom; second, it accumulates merit and virtue as provisions for attaining Buddhahood. Although our suchness-nature is pure, defiled habits from beginningless eons have not yet been eliminated. Without repeatedly permeating ourselves through various skillful means, afflictions cannot be purified.

These defiled afflictions pervade every place, and so we must cultivate every kind of wholesome conduct as their antidote. Furthermore, the Buddha is honored as perfect in both wisdom and merit; only when both are complete can one become a Buddha. If one has wisdom alone without merit, one is no more than an arhat and cannot become a Buddha. Therefore, one must widely practice all wholesome deeds and accumulate merit and virtue. Never rely complacently on one's natural endowment, neglect the cultivation of wholesome deeds, and thereby become lax, mistakenly fall into the evil realms, and commit a grave error!

Yet when practicing wholesome deeds, one must accord with no-mind and must not grasp at karmic rewards. If one grasps at such rewards, one falls into the human and deva destinies of ordinary beings, finds it difficult to realize suchness, and cannot escape birth and death. If one accords with no-mind, this becomes a skillful means for attaining Buddhahood. One can then transcend birth and death while also possessing vast favorable conditions and merit. The Diamond Sūtra says, "When a bodhisattva gives without abiding in characteristics, that person's merit and virtue are inconceivable!" These are words beyond price.

In closing, I have playfully composed a ci poem, in response to Qin Guan's and Tao Zhu's poems to the tune "Treading on Grass" on "Chenzhou Inn," to conclude this

essay. In former times, Chenzhou was desolate and sparsely populated, a place to which officials were demoted and exiled.

Because Qin Guan (Shaoyou) was banished there amid disputes over political reform, he was sorrowful and dejected. His poem therefore is full of grief, suffering, nostalgia, and longing for old friends. Tao's poem, by contrast, was prompted by the fact that Chenzhou had become flourishing and prosperous, with developed industry and beautiful surroundings. His heart was open, and he wrote in response with the opposite meaning. Thus his poem is bold, bright, brisk, and varied.

Both poems appeared in newspapers and were for a time widely praised. Combining the meanings of the two poems, I have composed another in response, to show that the Buddhadharma does not depart from worldly dharmas, and that worldly dharmas are themselves Buddhadharma. May it help all of you temper yourselves amid circumstances, remove habitual obstacles, perfectly realize bodhi, and shine brilliantly in worldly life. Where it falls short, I ask readers to correct me generously.

Mists obscure the towers; green spreads over the stream crossing—Peach Blossom Land is never apart from ordinary places!

Circumstances are neither good nor bad; the mind makes distinctions. Let things take their course—do not set up views!

The bridge leaps like a long rainbow; fish bear letters. The scenery is inherently inexhaustible!

At ease with conditions and open-hearted, let me drift and rise or sink; gladly I become spring mud to protect the multitude of flowers.

Having written this far, I could not help bursting into laughter! Suddenly I heard someone say, "What are you laughing at? Are you not afraid that once you open your mouth, you will be unable to close it?" I gave a mighty shout: "Who has ever seen me open my mouth?" Precisely so:

I have spoken fully of feelings as vast as clouds, mountains, seas, and moons;

Yet the lips have never moved, nor has the mind stirred.

The jade rabbit carries a fetus; the clam holds the moon;

The clay ox enters the sea; the wooden dragon chants!

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